



written by
Saki Aido
—— 英田サキ

illustrated by
Chiharu Nara
—— 奈良千春

イタ

VOL.1





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VOL.1

PARENTAL
EXPLICIT CONTENT
ADVISORY

June

Yaoi



Novel





“You can’t get by on one course,” Munechika said.

With Munechika still deep inside of him *and* pleasuring him in the front, Shiiba lost track of where he enjoyed being pleasured the most. He’d gone past simple arousal, Shiiba was almost lost in a dream, but his body kept moving.

“...Ngh, Munechika...Ah...”

“More, you want more?”

Written By
Saki Aida

Currently, I'm reading all the books I have on my bookshelves. I regret that I didn't read them when I had first bought them...how funny.

Illustrated By
Chiharu Nara

Born: June
Blood Type: O

I'm in a period now where I want to fix my ditzy personality.



Written by
SAKI AIDA

Illustrations by
CHIHARU NARA

English translation by
Translation By Design



S Vol.1

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Written by Saki Aida

Illustrated by Chiharu Nara

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Vol.1- Stranger

Sweet Admiration

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Beast's Pride

Afterword



Gun crime, including gun sales, is a highly volatile illegal act backed by organized crime, and the highly skilled methods that criminals now use to conceal weapons are of particular note. We need informants, to whom we can offer protection, to aid in our increasingly difficult investigations.

2003 Police White Paper – The Battle Against Organized Crime

Chapter 1

An ear-piercing, electronic noise interrupted his deep sleep. Masaki Shiiba let out a groan as he was jarred awake by the shapeless intruder. He wanted to smash the phone into silence, but instead, he grudgingly rolled out of bed and grabbed the receiver.

“Hello?” he growled, his voice hoarse and oozing with discontent. However, no reply came from the other end. Assuming that it was a prank call, Shiiba was just about to put down the receiver when finally a voice spoke on the other end.

It was the low voice of a man he didn’t recognize. Shiiba racked his brain, trying to place a name to it. Deciding that it was hopeless in his half-asleep state, Shiiba quickly gave up.

“Who...?” he asked.

Shiiba rubbed his eyelids between his thumb and index fingers. The back of his eyeballs stung. He felt a discomfort, as if a foreign object had pushed itself into his skull.

“Even if I told you my name,” the voice said, “you wouldn’t know who I am. But I know who you are.”

Upon hearing those strange words, Shiiba stopped rubbing his eyes. Inside his head, a red warning light began to flash.

“How did you get my number?” he asked after a pause.

“Be careful with Andou,” the voice said, ignoring his question.

“What?” Shiiba sputtered. “What do you mean...? Hey!”

The line was cut off. Shiiba gritted his teeth and put down the receiver. He was annoyed at having been woken up so early in the morning. Yanking the curtains open, he allowed the morning daylight to flood in, although it was still relatively dark due to the short winter days. Shiiba quickly glanced down at the street before heading to the bathroom.

He showered in the warm water and, eventually, his head began to clear. As Shiiba washed, he wondered if the warning had come from a superior. He arrived at the conclusion that too little information had been given for that to be the case.

Who on Earth was that man? He not only knew Andou, but also that Shiiba was connected to him. That in itself was not strange. Many people knew

that Shiiba and Andou were friends. But he had not given his phone number to any of those people besides Andou himself.

He finished his shower, wrapped a bath towel around his waist and entered the kitchen. From the fridge, he took out a cold bottle of mineral water and drank half of it in one gulp. Looking into the empty fridge, Shiiba replayed in his head what the man had said.

“Be careful with Andou.”

He didn’t know what it meant. He had known Andou for three years now, and they had built up a strong relationship. Andou was by far his most important professional contact—a man that Shiiba had no choice but to trust. It was unthinkable that he would have anything to be careful of with Andou. He couldn’t understand what the caller meant at all.

Troubled, Shiiba let out a small sigh. Andou was his S. He couldn’t doubt Andou. To doubt Andou would be to lose his footing. You either swam or sank with your S. Your fates were intertwined.

Putting the bottle back in the fridge, Shiiba went and stood in front of his closet. He chose a plain white shirt from it and pulled it over his naked skin. Next, he put on an expensive suit and combed back the hair that had fallen in front of his face. He then assessed the reflection that looked back at him from the mirror.

His shirt was open wide at the neck and on his chest glittered a gold chain. The dark suit wrapped around his slender body snugly.

Now fully alert, Shiiba took in his reflection and curled his mouth in disgust at what he saw.

He looked like a punk.

But that was fine. The moment that he left this room he was no longer Masaki Shiiba, detective. His name would be Akira Shibano. Saying the name to himself one more time, he closed the closet door on Masaki Shiiba.

Shiiba hung his head as he walked down Yasukuni road.

He was still a little early for his appointment, but he always tried to arrive early rather than make Andou wait. Whenever he was late he felt at a disadvantage. In this job, he had to make sure that things went according to plan, and that he was never in a position where he could be at a disadvantage. He took all possible measures to maintain his confidence.

As he made his way down the street, the people walking in the opposite direction would shuffle to one side upon seeing him approaching them. They

might not have meant to do it consciously, but it was a good indication of how Shiiba came across to other people. They weren't so terrified of him that they would throw themselves to one side, but they weren't about to encourage him to come any closer either.

"Ah, Mr. Shibano," a familiar voice called out to Shiiba as soon as he stepped onto Sakura Street, with its numerous brothels that catered to various fetishes. It was Moriguchi, who used to work at one of Andou's shops. "We've got a new girl in. This one's a real hottie!"

"Heh," Shiiba said with a smirk. "Well, I definitely wanna get myself some of that then."

"You say that every time, Mr. Shibano, but you never drop by," Moriguchi said. "Well, I guess a good-looking guy like you doesn't have to spend money to get some."

He shrugged his shoulders, looking disappointed.

Shiiba laughed and said, "Maybe next time."

"Give my respects to Mr. Andou," Moriguchi said.

"I will," Shiiba promised. "Keep on trucking, Moriguchi."

Andou operated several bathhouses in the Kabuki-cho area so he was well-known in this neighborhood. Through Andou, Shiiba had become acquainted with various people in this locale. You could never have too many connections when it came to intelligence gathering.

His destination lay just ahead, but Shiiba stopped in his tracks. He recognized a face in the dark alleyway. It was a young, well-dressed man screaming something at a much larger man who was restraining him. This was Toshiaki Akai, who was one of Andou's employees. Toshiaki was clearly in a foul mood and his long hair was in a mess.

"I told you to let me go!" Toshiaki was yelling. "You shit bag! What did I do? All I did was just kick the shop sign a little."

"A little?" the other man asked. "That was a big mistake. We'll talk about this at the police station. Come with me."

"Oh, come on, lay off, Mr. Detective," Toshiaki whined. "I didn't—," Toshiaki noticed Shiiba's presence and called out to him, "oh, Mr. Shibano!"

Cursing his luck, Shiiba walked over to the two of them, making sure not to give away any sign of recognition on his face.

"Shibano...?" the large man said, looking at Shiiba and frowning. He looked as if he was about to say something.

Shiiba ignored him and instead turned to Toshiaki. “What’s going on? What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything,” Toshiaki said. “This liquor store owner was giving me crap so on the way out of the store, I just gave the shop sign a little kick. And this...this detective said that I was destroying private property!”

Toshiaki’s face had turned very pale. The large bag that he was carrying probably contained drugs of some kind, something that would land him into trouble if the man did a search.

Shiiba looked at the detective who was standing in front of him and purposefully cocked his head in a show of surprise.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. Oosako!” he exclaimed. “It’s been a while. What a coincidence.”

Toshiaki’s eyes widened in surprise. “Huh? What? You know this detective?”

“It has been a while. You look well,” the detective replied cautiously.

“Oosako, this is a friend of mine. I know he acts like a jerk, but he’s a good guy underneath. Can’t you let him off? Just this once?” Shiiba wheedled.

He bowed his head, and Oosako nodded reluctantly.

“All right,” Oosako said. “I’ll let you off, just this once. All right, squirt? Don’t do it again. Next time, I’ll arrest you, no questions asked.”

Oosako had made his point. Toshiaki nodded in acknowledgment, but didn’t look entirely convinced.

“Toshiaki, go to the office and tell them that I’m going to be a little late,” Shiiba ordered. “Thanks.”

Nodding to Shiiba, Toshiaki left in a hurry. When he looked back, he saw Shiiba bow to Oosako again.

“I’m sorry,” Shiiba said softly.

“Mr. Shibano, is it now? Must be hard work,” Oosako sympathized with a grim face. “You look so different. I thought you were some kind of gigolo.”

Tonight, Shiiba wore a camel hair coat on top of his suit. He could indeed almost pass for a snobby gigolo.

“It’s work,” he said. “Mr. Oosako, where are you going?”

“Jyuku station,” Oosako replied. “Glad to be back in the fold. I decided to go back to regular detective work.”

Oosako’s words were poignant. This special job wasn’t something that just anyone was cut out for.

Oosako and Shiiba had been colleagues when they had worked at the main station in the Community Safety Division. The two of them had both been transferred to that division at the same time, and they had both been on the special training course in intelligence gathering.

Oosako was 10 years older than Shiiba, but they had gotten along very well when they were on the same course together. Of all the people, Oosako was the only one who did not view Shiiba with bias, but accepted him as he was. After that, they had been posted in a new sector within Community Safety, then to the Intelligence Section of the Arms and Narcotics Division. It was there that they had started working in the various types of information gathering.

However, after half a year, Oosako applied to get reassigned and left the head office. He wasn't the only one. Out of all the people assigned to Intelligence, only half had made it through. Some quit the police, others, like Oosako, had been reassigned. One by one, they had dropped out. Intelligence was not a popular department to be in.

"You're in COC5 now?" Shiiba nodded, responding to Oosako's question. "How is it? I heard that it was pretty tough?"

"The name is different, but most of everything else is the same as when I worked in Community Safety," Shiiba said.

"I suppose that's true," Oosako said with a pained smile. "However much the organization changes, the people in it are still the same."

In 2003, the Metropolitan Police had undergone a huge reform in which a new Counter-Organized-Crime Division had been set up. Organized crime by gangs, both local and foreign, had, until then, been policed by the Investigation, Community Safety and Public Security divisions. However, the methods used by organized crime groups had gotten worse in recent years—they had become trickier and increasingly more international, posing difficult problems for the Japanese police. Hence, a new division had been set up with increased powers called the Counter-Organized-Crime Division, or COC for short.

COC was made up of roughly 94 people who had previously been part of six other divisions: Unit 1 consisted of special investigators of foreign affairs that had been attached to the Public Security Division, Unit 2 handled the investigation of international crimes and had previously been part of the Detective Division, Unit 3 was a counter-gang unit once also attached to the Detective Division, Unit 4 was an investigative unit, Unit 5 was the Arms and

Narcotics Unit which had been a division of Community Safety that Shiiba had formerly been a part of. Finally, there was the Special Investigative Unit into International Organized Crime that was also a part of Community Safety. All of these units were then moved into the COC.

These different units had been part of the police force since 1967. Eventually, the long-standing investigative Unit 4 had ceased to exist. Several members of the police department had raised their voices in protest to this closure, arguing that Unit 4 had an important role in the police force. But the upper levels of management had already made their decision.

Ostensibly, it was merged into the Investigations Division. However, behind all the red tape and restructuring, there was speculation that the change was, in fact, the management's way of removing parts of the police force that were no longer 'desirable.'

The different areas of the force had become enemies on the field, no longer working together. The Foreign Crime, Violent Gang Crime, Arms and Narcotics Crime departments would all try to steal investigations from each other in cases where the crimes would inevitably overlap. This created an environment of secrecy where the number of arrests made had become an internal competition and detectives fought over cases. They would hide information from each other and cooperation between the departments was nil.

Also, police leadership had wanted to clean up Investigative Unit 4, which had started to become corrupted, its members collaborating with the gangs they were supposed to be working against in the first place.

"Shinjuku station must be tough too," Shiiba commented.

"Yeah, it's always busy there," Oosako said with a laugh.

Shiiba relaxed a little, nodding in agreement.

Kabuki-cho was the largest red-light district, not only in Japan, but in all of Asia too, and—quite possibly—in the world. It was congested, with about 3,700 establishments occupying a span of over 0.36 km. And everyday, more than 300,000 people visit it. Almost a hundred gangs held offices there, and illegal bathhouses, drug dealers, prostitution and battles between international criminal organizations showed no signs of declining.

In recent years, the Chinese mafia had increased their presence dramatically in Shinjuku. Even the Tokyo Immigration Bureau had set up an office in Shinjuku specifically dealing with illegal immigrants who hadn't filled in their residence papers. The Bureau coordinated closely with the Metropolitan Police covering Kabuki-cho.

“The head office is a total mess,” Oosako said. “Everyday is a nightmare. We have your special detectives going in and out all the time.”

The Metropolitan Police COC Special Detectives were mainly in charge of raids, especially those dealing with credit card and passport fraud. When they needed support, their best friend was always Shinjuku station.

Oosako added, “I get exhausted running around all the time, but I suppose I must enjoy it all really.”

Oosako was a veteran detective in this area. He was superb at confiscating guns and detecting drugs. His superiors had recognized these skills and reassigned him to the head office’s Arms and Narcotics Unit. But maybe because he was too honest, he just couldn’t handle the special assignments at head office.

“How are you doing?” Oosako asked.

“I’m getting by,” Shiiba answered. “I like this lone wolf kind of work.”

Oosako fell silent and looked at Shiiba like he was contemplating his words.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” he finally said. “If you get into trouble, no one is gonna help you out. Leads can always be a lizard’s tail. Never forget that.”

“Yeah,” Shiiba said.

“That Andou...” Even though there was no one nearby, Oosako lowered his voice as he said, “He’s your S?”

“Something like that,” Shiiba admitted.

“Your S lives in Kabuki-cho?” Oosako said. “If you get into any trouble you can call me anytime. If there is anything I can do, I’ll try my best.”

“Thanks,” Shiiba said, giving a quick bow before leaving Oosako.

As he walked, he subconsciously looked around. He couldn’t be caught talking to one of the Shinjuku police. Luckily, all he saw were some guys strutting in the distance.

He arrived at his destination in no time. Andou’s office was on the fifth floor of an old building. He waited for the elevator to come down. The doors opened with a chime. Just as he was about to get in, he stopped. There was already a person in there.

It was a large man he hadn’t seen before. Shiiba was 176 cm. himself, but this guy was almost 10 cm. taller than him. Over his muscular body, the man wore a black Cashmere coat and his long hair was slicked back. His

features were well-defined, rugged and eye-catching. However, his eyes seemed somewhat cold and his tight lips exuded attitude.

“Boss, all finished?”

Surprised at hearing a voice behind him, Shiiba spun around. Standing right behind him was a man wearing a high-collared black suit. He was about Shiiba’s age and a little taller. He had long narrow eyes and his hair was tied back. Shiiba had thought there was no one around, but the man must have caught up with him at some point.



“Yes,” the man from the elevator answered.

“The car is ready,” the other stranger said.

The man got out of the elevator, and, on seeing Shiiba waiting at the door, his mouth relaxed into a smile.

It wasn't an unfriendly smile. But Shiiba remained expressionless and just stepped aside. As the man passed by, Shiiba caught a sniff of a sweet fragrance.

The man turned back to Shiiba meaningfully. Once again their eyes met. With their eyes still locked, Shiiba pressed the close button. The doors slowly closed, finally breaking their gaze.

Inside the ascending box, Shiiba let go of the breath that he had unknowingly been holding. He had, without noticing, become very tense. No, he had been more than tense; he had been on his guard. It was difficult to put into words, but that man had a peculiar kind of menace about him. It wasn't the same as a gangster's, but he certainly wasn't an ordinary member of society either.

Shiiba had come into contact with countless people like him before. But those kinds of people were few and far between in this part of the city. Furthermore, he and the man had merely passed each other. Why had the incident put his nerves on edge like that? Shiiba thought it a little odd.

He got off at the fifth floor and opened the door in front of him. There was a small plate on the door that read “Marui Industries.” When he entered the room, he was greeted by a receptionist called Yumi Nishi who had been reading one of the weeklies.

“Oh, Mr. Shibano,” she said. “Good morning. The boss is waiting in his room.”

Shiiba smiled. “Thank you, Yumi. You're looking pretty today. That dress suits you.”

“Re-really?!” Yumi blushed. She used to work at one of Andou's bathhouses, but she had a naturally sweet personality that wasn't suited for a place like that. She was the kind of girl you could really relax around with. When she married one of Andou's men, Nishi, she had quit working at the bathhouse, and, for half a year now, had been working in the office. She was now considered a member of Andou's family.

It was called an office, but office work didn't happen here. All the place was, was a phone number. The real office was, in fact, at another location where they managed the businesses such as the bathhouses. This was the

base for Andou's underworld activities.

Shiiba knocked on the door to Andou's room. Not waiting for an answer, he opened the door. Andou was in the act of getting up off the sofa that he had been sitting on.

Nishi who had been sitting opposite him also stood up and nodded acknowledgment to Shiiba.

"Sorry I'm late," Shiiba said as a greeting.

"No, you helped Toshiaki out," Andou said. "Thank you."

Andou signaled for Shiiba to sit down on the sofa.

Shiiba did so, saying, "It was nothing. Just lucky it was a cop I knew."

He took a cigarette out from his business suit and Andou pulled out a light. Putting his face close to the flame, Shiiba took a deep breath. After blowing out a slow stream of smoke, he revealed what had been bothering him.

"Toshiaki might be being watched by the Shinjuku police."

"You mean that wasn't just coincidence?" Andou pulled a face as he played with the Cartier lighter.

"I just have a feeling," Shiiba said. "I can't be sure."

"For the moment, we'll assign him away from that kind of work then," Andou said after a pause. "He may have a good head on his shoulders, but he lacks discretion."

"I think that's a good idea," Shiiba said.

Their conversation sounded like something between a superior and an inferior, but, in fact, Andou was 31 and Shiiba was 30. In the public eye, Andou ran Korean salons, Turkish baths and some gaming shops, but, behind it all, he played his hand at prostitution and drug pushing. He was a young businessman who had found much success in Tokyo's underworld. He was wise beyond his years and had outstanding business acumen.

He was also a major player in the Matsukura Group, which was the umbrella organization of the regional Koujin Association. Andou was a corporate associate so he didn't have to deal with any of the actual work, which was instead overseen by his managers. Andou had used the Group's prestige to further the success of his business ventures. There was always a large difference between the shops that Andou ran and those that didn't have a crime syndicate's support in the background.

Andou was familiar with all the gang leaders that ran businesses. He was a perfect S. Shiiba couldn't have asked for a better resource person.

“For the time being, Toshiaki isn’t allowed to handle goods. Got that, Nishi?” Andou ordered.

“Understood, sir,” Nishi answered.

Nishi was Andou’s right-hand man. His job title was Executive Managing Director, but he wasn’t really involved in running the company. The management of Andou’s illegal activities was his real duty. Though a bit uninteresting, he seemed to be a capable person and was very aware of everything that happened around him.

“I have something for you. Next month, there is going to be a big crackdown,” Shiiba said.

Andou looked at Nishi.

“Again...” he murmured.

“The Metropolitan Police Counter-Crime Unit, the Community Safety Division and the Immigration Bureau are going to be cooperating with a total of 500 men apparently,” Shiiba continued.

Andou nodded with a serious expression. “Make sure that the shops are told to be careful. Thank you again. You’ve been a great help.”

There were plenty of foreign women illegally working in his bathhouses so an unexpected crackdown could potentially devastate his income.

“Mr. Shibano, how do you always manage to obtain that kind of information?” Nishi asked, looking thankfully at Shiiba.

Of course, there was no way that Shiiba could say it was a leak from his superior. In addition to himself, other investigators who were also using an S received this kind of classified information from above. As they were technically illegal, these undercover operations were unofficial and off the record. If the undercover investigators relayed valuable information to their S, then the trust between them would be strengthened. This was one of their duties. To ensure that the S’s operations went well, the investigators had to become their S’s benefactors, put them in their debt, and gain a psychological power over them.

“I have friends within the Metropolitan Police force,” Shiiba answered. “I told you before. I have a lot of influence in this business.”

“But that kind of classified information is pretty—” Nishi began.

“Nishi,” Andou interrupted. “Go there now and tell the managers to be careful. Be especially careful in the Korean place.”

“Understood, sir.” Nishi nodded, and stood up quickly.

When they were alone, Shiiba put out the cigarette and apologized.

Andou shook his head.

Only Andou knew that Shiiba was a detective. Andou had explained to Nishi and other members of his family that Shiiba was a freelance reporter who had helped him in the past. Shiiba also had kept with this lie and, when asked, he would say that he was writing a report on bathhouses and the underworld companies. That way it wouldn't be so suspicious when he had interesting information.

Sometimes, people would ask to see the reports that he had been writing, and when that had happened, he would give the name of a school friend who now worked as a non-fiction novelist. Shiiba would say that he was this guy's ghostwriter, so they should read his books. If the friend in question ever found out, there was no doubt that he would go red with rage.

Andou kept the truth even from Nishi, whom he put much faith in. He knew that a small tear in the cover could easily become a gaping hole. If it was discovered that he had been colluding with a detective, then that would spell the end of his life in this underground society.

When crossing such a dangerous bridge, there was no room for feeling guilty. Gathering information from his S was Shiiba's job. There was no sentimentality in it. He simply resolved to look for the deadly weapons buried somewhere in this city. That was Shiiba's one driving purpose.

In the Metropolitan Police COC5, Shiiba was part of the department that specialized in arms and his current duty was to obtain information on arms trafficking.

COC5 included the Narcotics and Arms Investigation Units. The unit that specialized solely in arms proliferation was split into two teams, the Incidents Team and the Intelligence Team. Shiiba had been assigned to the Intelligence Team so he wasn't at the forefront of operations, but rather, worked to gather intelligence from people who would cooperate.

Intelligence gathering was a shadowy existence. If an investigator managed to confirm the location of hidden arms, he would then relay that information to the Incidents Team. He wouldn't even participate in the following suspect interrogations.

Until the inauguration of the Counter-Arms unit within the Community Safety Division, arms investigations had been overseen by the investigative fourth unit, which specialized in crime syndicates. However, as gun crime had steadily increased, and the seizure of guns went on the decline, the Metropolitan Police had decided that conventional investigative methods might not be sufficient anymore. Thus, the plan they had adopted was a secret

intelligence initiative called an “S operation.”

Detectives would win over people who had positions in the crime syndicates and obtain from them information on arms trafficking. These inside informants were called “S” or a spy. It sounded like something straight out of a Hollywood movie script, but the reality was that the Metropolitan Police and the COC were using these S informants to gather intelligence throughout the city.

However, this wasn’t an easy task. First off, it was very difficult to find someone who would agree to collaborate as an S. The detectives had to build up a strong relationship of trust with those involved in organized crime. The detectives then had to liaise with the people who were most likely to be useful to them. These people were, more often than not, hardened criminals. To any person with a strong sense of morality and justice, especially someone like a police officer, this was a psychologically taxing experience.

Then, even if you managed to find someone that you could use as an S, there was still the danger that something could happen to your S if his identity was revealed. Also, regular meetings with your S meant that there would also be instances where you couldn’t avoid being involved in illegal activities. The emotional drain on the investigator was extraordinary and involved enormous personal risk.

“Have you found out any more?” Shiiba asked, returning to the main issue.

Andou made a face. “There is no doubt that he’s a dealer. I looked into his financial situation, and when I showed him the cold hard cash, he ate it up.”

Andou had become acquainted with a male Chinese resident in Japan through his overt business relations. The man operated a trading company in the capital and his name was Ying Fa Lin. When Andou had told him at a bar that he had a small gun shop in Ikebukuro, the Chinese man had shown a great deal of interest. Andou’s gun shop was rather small and he let other people manage it, but it had become a great way to elicit information from a target.

Andou had met with the man several times and the Chinese man had come to see his shop. He had asked if Andou was interested in seeing ‘real guns.’

“You didn’t agree to a deal, did you?” Shiiba asked.

Andou answered immediately, “Of course not.”

In principle, for the informant and the investigator to allow a crime to happen was not a crime itself. Narcotics were left to the drug enforcement officers of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, whereas the proliferation of guns was the domain of the police and the coast guard. However, negotiations that had led to arrests in which the informant had instigated or provoked a crime could cause big problems later, when the criminal was apprehended. In cases dealing with arms sales, the restrictions were particularly severe, so there hadn't really been much on the ground investigation.

"It was him that was interested," Andou added. "He said that he could get hold of any number of guns."

Perhaps the man was a big time broker. If that were the case, then this would be a real breakthrough. Shiiba knew what his supervisors would tell him to do though. It was always the same order: don't actively pursue, only observe. He had to obey orders.

"Keep meeting with him, but don't make him suspicious," Shiiba advised. "Even if he wants to speed up the negotiations, try your best to prolong it."

"Understood," Andou answered..

Andou was an excellent S. Through his information, the police had been able to seize dozens of weapons and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. However, the higher powers wanted not only to seize arms, but also to obtain information on the delivery methods. Thus, in these sorts of cases, the police would have proceeded with a CD or Controlled Delivery Investigation.

Controlled Delivery Investigation was a method often used in narcotics intelligence where the police wouldn't make an arrest at the scene, but, under sufficient observation, would allow the drug dealers to continue so that the police could discover the recipients and sources of the drugs. Even if the police arrested the end seller, there would be many people in-between that would get away. The organization that was behind the trafficking would try and hide itself as best it could. It was always a game of cat and mouse between the police and the criminals.

Now was the perfect time for an investigator on the scene like Shiiba to employ a CD investigation. It was imperative to produce results in the current police system and this was exactly the sort of case where Shiiba could get results. Through Shiiba's efforts, countless arms across the country had been discovered. Those were the figures that his bosses required of him. They had even faked situations where his own S's gun was 'seized.'

After several scandals as a result of these CD investigations, the police force had changed its policy to no longer look for individual guns, but rather to focus on discovering the larger organizations behind the sales. That said, the public still demanded the same statistics as those in previous years. However, this new approach had a large effect on the statistics. Gun crime increased and arms seizures decreased. It was now a matter of grave concern for the police force.

Now the detectives had the double responsibility of maintaining the number of seized guns up and also of gathering information on the crime syndicates in the background. These conflicting demands had put amazing pressure on the detectives in the field.

After the meeting, Shiiba stood up. He had to meet with other informants now. Andou was the only one registered with the Metropolitan Police as an S, but there were several other men in this criminal society that would part with information for a little money.

Andou quickly stood up as well and opened the door for Shiiba. Andou always did this, but Shiiba felt that there was something odd about his attitude this time.

Shiiba sensed that behind Andou's obedience, he was hiding something.

"I'll be back. If anything happens, let me know," Shiiba said.

"Yes, and thank you for the information," Andou said.

When standing together, Andou was taller. But despite his height, Shiiba didn't sense any kind of intimidation from him. Perhaps this was because of Andou's reticence and mildness.

He suddenly remembered that phone conversation.

"Be careful with Andou."

The voice of the unknown man floated at the back of his mind like an illusion.

"Your hair has grown," Andou said, his fingers stroking the back of Shiiba's neck.

Shiiba turned around quite violently and Andou quickly apologized, withdrawing his fingers.

"Yeah, I should get it cut," Shiiba said after a pause.

"Long hair suits you," Andou said. "I like it."

"Really? Well, maybe I'll let it grow a while, then." Shiiba smiled and Andou's eyes opened a little wider. Shiiba rarely smiled so Andou had been taken off guard. "Andou, I want to thank you for everything. I know it's difficult

for you. You are going to keep working with me, aren't you?" Shiiba said suddenly.

Andou looked troubled. However, he immediately replied as expected, "I'm Mr. Shibano's S. I'm not going to let you down in any way. Please don't worry."

Shiiba nodded at Andou's reassuring words and pushed the issue one last time, looking intently at him. "You're the only one that I can rely on."

Andou looked back at Shiiba, not blinking once. His eyes were full of a burning emotion that he couldn't hide.

Shiiba, finally satisfied, said that he could see himself out and left the room. Stepping out onto the street, he melted into the crowd. It had only been for a brief moment, but Andou's fingertips were warm and he could still feel the man's touch on his neck. He let out a sigh.

Such foolishness. Andou had feelings for him. What Shiiba was doing made him despise even himself. He would go so far as to abuse someone's love if the job required it. Oosako had told him he had changed. It had been over two years since Shiiba first created his other identity, Shibano. He remembered that, at first, he had been entirely unfamiliar with the town and everything made him nervous and uncomfortable. Now it was his everyday life. There wasn't anyone looking at Shiiba who would have thought that he was a cop. He had worked hard at not looking like one, because if he hadn't, then there would have been trouble.

However, the more he became involved in this city, the more he felt the self-contradiction. The desire to run away from it all was growing; to run away from this job where he had to hide who he was, cooperate and build trust with people he should be apprehending. The more he did it, the more it wore him out. It was like a part of his heart was becoming numb. Perhaps it would be better to retire from it all like Oosako had done.

He wondered why he kept going despite all these reservations. The job didn't feel like justice. It was a job that anyone with no moral standards could do. To get information on one crime, he had to watch other crimes happen right in front of his eyes. That was his life, everyday.

Ultimately, he never quit because he felt responsible somehow.

Chapter 2

The next afternoon, Shiiba left home and headed to an apartment block located in Shibuya. For the most part, the block was full of tenants, with the exception of the third floor, which was the operations base of the Matsuda Unit that Shiiba was employed in. Once a week, he would meet with the head of the unit and the seven other investigators in his group. Each investigator would give a report on their recent activities at the meeting.

The investigators of the intelligence unit had to hide their identities for their undercover research, so they couldn't enter an official police building without first obtaining prior permission. Hence, the necessity for this weekly meeting. Since Shiiba began this job, he had hardly been near a police station.

The Counter Organized Crime Intelligence Unit 5 was divided into various teams. One team focused on shipping ports, another team on the importers, and another on international sales brokers. They would slowly infiltrate organizations from which they could easily obtain information on guns. The Matsuda team's target was, of course, gangsters.

Present that day, in addition to the seven investigators and Supervisor Asada, was Section Head Takasaki, who was the overall head of the Intelligence Team. Takasaki would show up about once a month to give specific orders, but generally speaking, it was very rare for the Section Head to go there.

After each investigator had given a report on their information and the development of their surveillance, they would then receive notices or orders from their superiors. Takasaki appealed to them to try and gather as much information as possible on weapons dealers and trafficking routes because there were fears that armed skirmishes between rival gangs might soon break out into a full-scale war.

In the room, there was a desk at which each person would go to file his report. Shiiba, like the other investigators, took out one of the forms. After writing down where and for how long he had met with Andou and his other informants, and putting in details of any information gleaned from these meetings, he handed it to Takasaki who was sitting on the sofa.

Shiiba was then stopped by Asada who was sitting beside Takasaki. "Mr. Shiiba, can I have a minute?"

“Yes, what is it?” he asked, stopping and turning to face Asada who was still sitting. Shiiba was older, but Shiiba was of detective rank while Asada was a captain. The difference was like that of heaven and Earth.

“Yesterday, I had dinner with Counselor Shinozuka,” Asada said. “The counselor was quite concerned about you. He hasn’t been able to reach you whenever he calls. It’s worried him quite a bit, so could you please contact him?”

Shiiba knew that Asada wasn’t giving advice from the goodness of his heart. No good could come about if his name was mentioned. Asada probably had an ulterior motive. He was the kind of man who only really had interest in the progression of his own career.

“I’m sorry that I worried him,” Shiiba said. “I’ll call him today.”

Asada gave a satisfied nod, and, having finished his business, followed Takasaki back to headquarters.

One of the investigators started the ball rolling with a whispered, “A real official, that’s something.”

“Right!” another investigator called out. “Hey, Shiiba, what makes you more special than all us other investigators?”

“Well, it was bound to happen,” still another joined in. “Andou has been working so hard for him, he’s due for something good.”

Hidden behind the laughter and the jokes was real envy. The truth was that Shiiba hadn’t had to pay Andou a single yen. You could pay your S for information or as a thank you for his cooperation, but Andou had not even once accepted money. When mentioned, it almost seemed to annoy him.

Shiiba knew this was just the beginning, so he just ignored the taunts, nodded his farewells and left the room alone.

He was accustomed to his colleagues’ hatred. The police force was an unforgiving world. One of its rules was that you treated your superior like a pet would a master. However, Shiiba was different in that he wouldn’t kiss up and give fake smiles, and therefore, didn’t endear himself to the detectives above him.

Furthermore, he was the youngest detective within COC5. Shiiba was the lowest in the hierarchy, but he was the one who obtained the most valuable information when it came to gun proliferation. Because of this, he found himself the target of criticism.

However, the main reason that Shiiba attracted the other detectives’ hostility was that he received special treatment from the Metropolitan force.

But even he couldn't do anything about this.

After graduating from the Police Academy, Shiiba had been employed by a regional police station in Motofuji. In his local police station, he had become a detective at 25. To become a detective at that age was unheard of.

To make detective, you had to take an intelligence-gathering course that was held only once a year. To take the course, you had to be recommended by your police chief, but only one or two people could receive this recommendation. There were several police officers that waited year after year to receive this recommendation—getting that far was hard enough.

Finally, even if you managed to obtain the recommendation, there were only 40 or 50 places available. So among the 101 stations, over a hundred police officers were recommended and more than half of them failed the selection examination. These were not small obstacles, so no matter how good the police officer was, you usually had to wait until at least you were in your late 20's or early 30's to become a detective.

Shiiba had defied all these, becoming a detective at an extraordinarily young age, and had been transferred to the Metropolitan Police after only a year. The competition in head office was inordinately high. To be a detective at head office at such a young age, it was only natural that the people around him thought it to be the result of favoritism.

Then, there was Shiiba's brother-in-law. His sister had died six years ago, so now he was only brother-in-law in name. Regardless, they were like family.

His brother-in-law's name was Hideyuki Shinozuka. He was on a civil servant career track at 36 and was now a police captain. He was now working at the Metropolitan Police Public Security Department as a Counselor for Security Policy.

In a police organization that was very close and restricted, Shiiba often felt the presence of his brother-in-law behind him, making him feel oppressed and surrounded. Curious eyes. Jealousy. Resentment. If he ever floundered, his civil servant brother-in-law would always be there to lend him a helping hand.

However, the reason that his peers rejected him was not only because of his brother-in-law. Part of it was because Shiiba's career history was also entirely different from theirs.

After Shiiba's four years at the Academy, against all odds, he had passed the examination for first-class civil service. But when he had been given a job offer as an officer at the Metropolitan Police, he had turned it down. He then did the unthinkable and took the test again to be a local government employee

and joined as a non-career track police officer.

In other words, rather than taking the career track of a civil servant and thus having the possibility of rising to the top, he instead had chosen to work on the field as nothing more than a lowly foot soldier. Even though it was laughed at as total idiocy, no one could change his mind. Shiiba knew that those who knew his background would mock him for his life choice, since they were full of jealousy. He tried not to care, but the reality was wherever he went, he couldn't fit in with his peers.

In the corridor, as he was waiting for the elevator, a voice called out to him. Turning around, he saw that it was Takehara who had been in the same room as him just now.

Takehara was the oldest detective in the Matsuda team. He was probably not quite 50 yet, but his hair was white and his eyes were outlined with deep creases. He was kind and looked out for others, and was fondly called 'Take' by everyone.

"Don't worry too much about it," he said. "They're just bitter because you always bring back good information."

"I don't care," Shiiba said. He immediately regretted his blunt reply. Takehara was concerned for him. The man had even followed him out to talk with him.

However, Takehara didn't even seem to notice Shiiba's rudeness. "Well, that's all right. You've been working too hard. Remember that plenty of men have been fired when they worked too hard. No one ever gets fired for not working in this place," he said with a cheeky grin across his face. He was right. "It would be great if this Chinese man Andou is meeting with is it," Takehara added.

"Yes, I want to try and get closer to him," Shiiba said.

They got into the elevator together. Takehara said in a quiet voice, "Hey, Shiiba, Andou is an excellent S. He's done a lot for you. So make sure that you look out for him. Looking after our S is an important job. There are those that use the weaknesses of their S, but those relationships are weak. Using money is the same. It can always betray you. You need to have something greater. Trust them and be trusted. It's the only real way."

The words of a veteran investigator who had used an S held a lot of weight. Shiiba had heard the rumors that when Takehara's S had been targeted by a gang, Takehara had taken a gun himself and stayed at his S's house to protect the man.

The elevator arrived at the first floor. Just as the elevator opened Takehara said, “Hey, Shiiba. Your S is like your woman.”

“My woman?” Shiiba said.

“Yes, even though they are criminals, even though they are an enemy to our society, they rely on us. It’s kind of lovable.”

He understood what Takehara was trying to say. Shiiba cared for Andou a lot. He needed him. However, that kind of emotion made it all the more dangerous. Of course, trust was a necessity, but your S was more like a pet dog. He had to try and remember that.

“My S is my important partner,” he said. “We have the same interests. I obtain the information and he receives special treatment from the police. The bottom line is they don’t do it for nothing.”

Hearing himself say those words, Shiiba couldn’t help but know that they were wrong. He cared for Andou a lot. At the bottom of his heart, he even felt a little scared of the strength of those affections. It was difficult to deny that his relationship with his S was strong enough for him to go beyond the call of duty.

“If anything happens, the officers at the head office will tell you to cut yourself off from your S,” Takehara said.

“That’s why I don’t want anything more than a business partnership with my S,” Shiiba insisted. “Isn’t that what you think?”

Takehara rephrased his comment. “No matter what our supervisors say, our job is to protect our S. No, it’s not quite a job. It’s not an issue of duty. It is simple human relations. Maybe because you are still young, you don’t understand. But, you know, Shiiba, having an S is gambling with life.”

Shiiba guessed that Takehara was trying to say that he, Shiiba, wasn’t ready. The man didn’t intend to be mean-hearted about it, but from the standpoint of a veteran investigator, Shiiba was still a rookie, not yet able to be trusted entirely.

After Takehara left, Shiiba took the Yamanote line to Ikebukuro. He left Ikebukuro East Station and walked down busy Sunshine Street. He headed towards a small gun shop located under the train line. The sign said “Gunshop Aviz.” It was the shop that Andou managed.

Opening the glass door, Horibe who ran the shop, called out to him. Horibe was a large man in his mid-30’s who wore a beard. He was a huge fan of guns.

“Mr. Shibano,” he said. “Long time, no see. Still alive then? I thought you might have drowned in Tokyo harbor.”

“Hey, think I would bite the dust that easily?” Shiiba retorted.

Pretending to admire a Colt Government that was decorating a showcase, Shiiba looked around the shop. The only patrons were two young boys who looked like students.

“Wanna sit down?” Horibe offered. “Take your time.”

Horibe was sitting by the counter and was holding disassembled parts of a model gun in his hand. Andou had acquired this toy and model gun shop about two years ago and Horibe was employed as its salesman. Model guns weren’t just Horibe’s work though, they were his passion too, so he’d also take on repair work.

Shiiba sat down next to Horibe and took a quick look at the notebook computer that was there. The browser was opened to the store’s homepage, more specifically, to a forum page where anyone could contribute. There were lots of posts rating how this particular gun manufacturer was, or how to obtain a certain clip for this or that.

“Business slow as usual then,” he commented.

“You always say that,” Horibe answered. “What do you expect? This is a model gun shop. It’s always not going to be packed. Besides, kids today are only interested in survival games. If they want to buy something, they prefer an electric gun or an air gun. I told Mr. Andou that he wouldn’t make much of a profit. But as long as I don’t go into the red, he doesn’t seem to mind.”

Survival games used BB guns or toy guns. The popularity of those toy guns meant a decline in the popularity of model guns. However, the complexity and precision required in creating model guns was far greater. Because of this aesthetic, there were enough hardcore collectors who stuck rigidly to collecting model guns.

“How are things lately?” Shiiba asked. He wasn’t talking about the shop’s ledger.

“I haven’t heard anything,” Horibe answered.

Horibe also wrote articles about toy guns for magazines. His homepage was pretty popular among gun enthusiasts because there was a lot of random information in it.

One time, there had been a man on the Internet who had wanted to procure the real thing, but Horibe had let Shiiba know right away. COC5 had acted quickly and managed to avoid the crime.

Another time, emails from some students that had been sent to Horibe had raised suspicions that they might be in possession of real guns. The students in question were made to turn themselves in after Shiiba's persuasions.

Previously, gun sales had been the sole special interest of crime syndicates. But with the popularization of the Internet, now even ordinary citizens who liked and owned guns became involved in the conflict. Shiiba would often drop by because Horibe would receive this kind of information.

Andou employed Horibe, but he was an ordinary employee and not a member of the family. So, even though Horibe was aware that he was a detective, Shiiba met him under his assumed name. Horibe himself disliked gun enthusiasts who searched out real weapons. That's why he always helped Shiiba out in his investigations.

"Just keep getting these idiots that come in asking questions like 'Can I get real guns anywhere?'" Shiiba said.

Horibe nodded and moved the mouse. He clicked an icon and a display of sales came up.

There was a model gun that looked like a Ruger that was labeled "Marushin, South 14 style MAXI, Later model HW."

"I've seen this one," said Shiiba.

Horibe raised an eyebrow in interest. "Which one?"

Shiiba pointed. "That one. When I was in Community Safety, I got a tip about a house with a gun. I did a search and pulled this out of the closet. It was pretty rusted though."

Horibe laughed. "The South 14 style is a semi-automatic hand gun that the army used to use. A lot of veterans brought them back from the war and kept them."

"Yeah, the person in question had passed away and no one else seemed to know that it was even in the house," Shiiba said.

In cases like that, the police wouldn't punish the family. In the 1995 gun law revisions, a system had been put in place where you could turn the gun in yourself. If you handed the gun to the police before they detected it, then the sentence would be decreased or waived.

The two students buzzed with excitement as they looked over at the showcase near the counter.

"That's a Colt Government 70 Series, isn't it?" one asked.

"Wow. So cool," his friend agreed.

“It’s a beauty, all right. You wanna buy one?” Horibe said.

One of the students that Horibe had called out to turned around and looked at the shop owner as if he was joking with them.

“I can’t afford that,” the boy said.

“But it looks cool, right?” Horibe laughed. “Strictly advanced order only. If you want it, you better say so quickly.”

“I really can’t afford it,” the boy insisted.

After a few more longing gazes into the showcase, the students left. Shiiba watched them leave with an ambivalent feeling in his heart.

“Even kids wanna get into them,” he said.

“Hmm?” Horibe put the dismantled cylinder onto the worktable, pointed at Shiiba’s forehead and laughed. “You’re going to get wrinkles worrying that much.”

He continued, “Come on, Mr. Shibano, you must have had a toy pistol when you were a kid and pretended to fire it at your friends? You know, BANG BANG.”

“Yeah, guess I did,” Shiiba admitted. “I had a toy gun. Made me feel like a real action hero. My parents got it for me.”

“I knew it,” Horibe said. “Boys are all the same. Guns are just so cool. They’re fun to look at and never get boring.”

Understanding what Horibe was trying to say, Shiiba smiled wryly. People who liked looking cool were not criminals. They didn’t see guns as weapons and they didn’t need to get close to the real thing. They were just satisfied with looking the part. However, the reality was that some people desired more and sought out the real thing. According to the statistics, guns seized from people not involved in organized crime had risen above that of guns seized from gangs.

Shiiba ran his finger down the black body of a Beretta that had caught his eye. The metal felt cold to the touch. The gun had a unique shape. It was a strange feeling. He understood the fascination.

However, a gun wasn’t a toy. It was a deadly weapon that had the capacity to seriously wound or take a person’s life with the squeeze of a trigger. An errant bullet could easily rob someone of a life. All it took was a moment.

A sad memory floated in the back of Shiiba’s mind. Something beautiful that he lost because of a small bullet.

If only he could rid the world of all guns...

That was the only firm conviction Shiiba held onto now.

The shop owner led Andou and Shiiba through the shop entrance to a separate room. They were at a restaurant that Andou liked in Minamiaoyama.

After ordering some food, Shiiba immediately questioned Andou. "What happened?"

As soon as Andou had gotten into the car, Shiiba had noticed that the man was acting strangely. Andou had surveyed the cars in front and at the back, and those that passed. As he got out of the car and entered the restaurant, he was careful of his surroundings.

"No, nothing," Andou replied.

"Something's up," Shiiba insisted. "You're restless. You're not yourself."

Andou was a little hesitant, but soon he started talking. "I feel like I'm being watched."

"Why? Who?" Shiiba asked, stunned.

"I don't know," Andou replied after a pause.

For a moment, Shiiba thought it might be a police officer working in Narcotics. But that couldn't be, because Andou was listed in the police computer system as under investigation. Shiiba had done the listing himself. It couldn't be a police officer following Andou.

Organized crime relating to narcotics was generally spread over a wide area, so there was quite often competition between the different stations. Therefore, if a suspect was arrested or being investigated for narcotics crimes then a code called a 'Y card' would be inputted into the suspect's file, which would then be uploaded to the Metropolitan Police's main computer. The system would coordinate cases where investigations clashed.

Therefore, if a police officer had indeed been tracking Andou, then when they logged on, they would know straight away that COC5 was investigating the man. Even if officers from another prefecture were involved, they couldn't start an investigation without prior permission from the Metropolitan Police force. In other words, by exploiting the system, Shiiba had ensured protection for his S, at least from other police members.

If it wasn't the police, then it was possible that it was a gang member who was in a dispute with Andou's group or a drug official. But it was unlikely that an organized crime gang was following Andou.

“Could it be a drug official?” Shiiba mused.

Andou looked a little troubled. Drug officials were employed in a special section of the police. They fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare so they were a separate entity from the units that policed narcotic crime.

If a drug official was tailing Andou, then that could cause some real problems. The police and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare didn’t share information so anything that Shiiba entered into the computer database would not be relevant.

“Hey, Andou, why don’t you stop with the drugs?” Shiiba urged. “If throwing that business away entirely is too much, then give it to someone else below to do, and just take a portion of the profits.”

Andou didn’t say anything. He was probably considering the best course of action.

“For the time being, just move it all to a safe place and don’t distribute it to the dealers for a while,” Shiiba advised.

“Yes, I’ll do that,” Andou finally conceded.

“Promise me,” Shiiba insisted. “If it really is a drug official, then I won’t be able to protect you.” Shiiba made eye contact with Andou to push his point.

As Andou nodded, they heard a shuffling from behind the sliding door and a waitress carried in their food. Her entrance ended that line of conversation.

During their meal, they discussed the Chinese dealer Ying Fa Lin instead.

“Did you meet with Lin yesterday? How did it go?” At the moment, Shiiba wanted information on Lin more than anything else.

“It seems Lin will go back to China tomorrow and return on the 10th of next month,” Andou said. “I told him that I had a friend called Mr. Shibano with an interest in guns. I said that you were a little rich kid who had inherited a large fortune from his parents and he seemed pretty interested in that. Then when I met him, he said that he had something good to show me and took out a gun. It was a Tokarev, but there was something strange...”

“Strange? How do you mean strange?” Shiiba asked.

“It had no markings,” Andou answered.

“No markings? Scratched off?” Shiiba said.

“No, it never had them,” Andou clarified. “I asked him if it was a bootleg and Lin said that it was a genuine made-in-China, a Tokarev.”

Usually, a gun was engraved with the maker’s name and a serial number.

Among the Tokarev brought into Japan, there were plenty whose markings had been scratched off to prevent detection of their place of origin, but to never have had those markings was indeed strange.

“He also said that if I don’t like the Tokarev, he has a Makarov that he can also get in bulk,” Andou added.

Shiiba wanted to speak to Lin directly at least once. There was, most probably, a large organization working behind the man.

“When Lin gets back to Japan, arrange a meeting,” he requested. Andou didn’t nod straight away and looked troubled. Shiiba tried to probe him. “Is there a problem?”

“I think it’s best if you didn’t meet with him,” Andou replied. “That man has strange interests.”

“Strange interests? What do you mean?” Shiiba asked.

Andou started to explain himself, but he wasn’t being clear. “He asked me to introduce him to some girls. But he’s into S&M and the girls didn’t like it one bit. They are the most important asset in my work so I warned him, but then he wanted men...”

“Men?”

“Yes. He wanted young, pretty men. I think that he actually prefers men to women. If Lin sees a guy like yourself then....” Andou left the rest of his sentence hanging.

He was worried that Lin would lust after Shiiba. Shiiba understood this advice came from Andou’s concern for him, but it wasn’t enough to change his mind.

Andou might also have been saying it out of jealousy. It could all have been out of self-interest. It was a testament to the deep affection that he had for Shiiba.

“Don’t worry,” Shiiba said, trying to lighten the mood. “You’ll be with me.”

Andou still didn’t look happy, but he didn’t say anything anymore.

When they finished dinner, they each had coffee.

“It’s coming up soon,” said Shiiba, bringing the cup to his mouth.

“What is?” Andou asked, puzzled.

“Miss Kaori’s anniversary,” Shiiba replied. “Shall we go to the tomb together?”

Andou nodded at Shiiba’s request. “Thank you for remembering again

this year.”

“Don’t thank me,” Shiiba said. “Of course I would remember.”

It still hurt for Shiiba to remember Kaori. If only he had been more careful. It was his biggest regret.

Kaori had been Andou’s younger sister by four years. She had worked in a regular company and lived on her own in an apartment, but she had been the victim of a vicious stalker. It was when she had filed a complaint with the Motofuji station that Shiiba had gotten to know her. It was about the same time that Shiiba had left uniformed police work to become an undercover detective.

The stalking had continued. They had worked out that it was a 39-year-old guy who lived in the city and who used to date Kaori. The Motofuji police had warned him, as was standard, and the stalker stopped. They thought that they didn’t need to worry anymore. But then one day, the stalker had suddenly forced his way into Kaori’s home and strangled her to death. The stalker had held it against her that she had gone to the police.

It was while he was checking up on Kaori that Shiiba met Andou. He had found it difficult to believe that the man who cared so sincerely about his sister also ran bathhouses in Kabuki-cho and had organized crime connections.

After Kaori’s death, Shiiba bowed to Andou so many times. He could only apologize for not protecting her.

About a month afterwards, Andou had unexpectedly approached Shiiba with some information on a man who was hiding guns. When he investigated, it was just as Andou had said. His unit had ended up seizing guns and several hundred rounds of ammunition from the man’s house. It was at that point that Shiiba had decided to take a position in the Counter Guns unit and had been reassigned from Community Safety.

During the investigation of that case, his superiors had decided that Andou had the right personality to be an informant. Shiiba was ordered to get more information out of Andou. It was now close to three years that the two of them had been partnered in this way.

“Andou, can I ask you something?” Shiiba said.

“Of course,” Andou answered.

“After Kaori died, why did you bring me that lead?” Shiiba asked.

Andou narrowed his eyes as if trying to remember.

“You really cared about Kaori,” he replied. “When she died, you even cried with me. Kaori used to tell me that she had a really reliable detective

watching over her, so I needn't worry anymore. Before, when she told people about the stalker, no one had listened. You listened and visited her so many times. She was so grateful to you. Me too. I'm really glad that we met."

Was this simple gratitude? It was like Andou was trying to express himself, but couldn't.

Shiiba couldn't return the love. "I guess it was a thank you, then. We're the same, aren't we?" he said.

"The same...?" Andou asked.

"Yes. We both lost our parents, and were left with only our sisters," Shiiba clarified. "And then to have that one most important person murdered."

He had told Andou that he had lost his sister. It had been after Kaori's funeral, they had been drinking together and it had slipped out. Maybe he had wanted to empathize with Andou, whose pain he knew only too well.

"Mr. Shiiba, you and I have known the same pain." Andou didn't call him Mr. Shibano as he normally did. He called him by his true name.

Shiiba was a little shaken by this sudden change in atmosphere.

He picked up the ashtray on the table and motioned for Andou's lighter. Andou didn't open the lighter for him, but just held it out. Reaching out to take it, the silver lighter was softly placed into Shiiba's hand.

In the next instant, something Shiiba hadn't expected happened. Andou grabbed the hand that Shiiba was holding the lighter in. The place where he touched felt hot. That heat then moved up Shiiba's arm to fill his entire body. It didn't seem real. Shiiba was overcome by an intense uneasiness, almost like a panic.

"Andou..." His small voice called the name out like a desperate plea. Andou remained expressionless and then released Shiiba's hand. The place became filled with an uneasy silence.

As Shiiba tried to form words, Andou stood up.

"Let's go," he said.

He was acting like nothing had happened. Shiiba felt enraged that Andou had scared him like that. But when Andou turned around, Shiiba's anger dissipated. Andou had just held his hand, and Shiiba had become flustered. If Andou really was after him, then Shiiba didn't know what he would do.

He had been so confident in Andou's obedience. Andou was his tamed dog. However, now he felt like he should take care that Andou's emotions didn't endanger this working relationship.

Feeling troubled by this development, he opened the sliding door and stepped out into the corridor. Standing there was an eye-catching, tall man. Shiiba stopped in his tracks.

Their eyes met. Upon noticing Shiiba, the corners of the man's mouth turned up meaningfully.

It was the same man he had passed at Andou's office. Tonight, he was wearing a simple three-piece suit and looked like an ordinary white-collar worker. But he still had a strong presence about him.

"Well, if it isn't Munechika?" Andou said, greeting the man. "Here for dinner?"

"Yeah," the man answered. "Kaname said this was a good restaurant and brought me here."

"I see," Andou said. "Mr. Kaname is here too." Behind the man was a slim young man to whom Andou gave a nod. It was the man who had been wearing the black suit. Today he was in gray.

The man called Kaname gave his respects. "I haven't spoken with you in a while. I'm glad to see that you're looking well." It looked like he was Munechika's secretary or in a position similar to it.

"We should be going."

"Yes, we're leaving now anyway," Andou said. "Thank you for taking the trouble to come to the office the other day."

Munechika laughed and said it was nothing. He had apparently been visiting Andou that day.

"If there is anything I can do, please don't hesitate to let me know," he said.

"Yes, thank you again," Andou said, cutting the conversation short, perhaps concerned that he was making Shiiba wait.

Following behind Andou, Shiiba also nodded as he passed Munechika. But suddenly, his arm was grabbed from behind, holding him back.

"Be careful with Andou." To Shiiba's amazement, the familiar words resounded quietly in his ear. Those words. That voice. It couldn't be.

This was the mysterious man from the phone call...

When Shiiba opened his mouth to say something, Munechika quickly released him and hurried past. As Shiiba stared behind him, Andou turned around suspiciously.

"Mr. Shibano? Is something wrong?" he inquired.

“No,” Shiiba replied and caught up with Andou.

After dealing with the bill they got into the car. Inside, Shiiba asked Andou, “Who was that guy just now?”

“Mr. Munechika? He is the organization’s assistant,” Andou replied as he pulled out of the parking lot.

Shiiba knew now that the man was indeed Yakuza.



“He runs a business, so he’s not like the others,” Andou continued explaining. “Same as myself. He has quite a lot of power in the group.”

A Yakuza employed in the same group as Andou. Why had he come to meet him? And why the advice?

“Mr. Munechika was a senior in my school,” Andou said. “We used to do stupid stuff together. A year before I lost Kaori, we met again in Kabuki-cho by coincidence, and we started up an acquaintance again. He was the one who invited me to the Matsukura Group. You used to have to pay protection money to the Yakuza, but as I had businesses in Kabuki-cho, he suggested that I affiliate myself and get the support of the group instead.”

In Kabuki-cho, there were various forms of protection money, and sometimes it could cause some complications. A businessman affiliated to gang members made business that much easier.

“He was the child of the former president’s lover,” Andou revealed.

“So he will take over?” Shiiba asked.

“No, that position is intended for the president’s son by his official wife, so Munechika was pushed aside,” Andou said. “The thing is that the new president is a young and spoiled child, so I think that the members of the organization will want Munechika to succeed instead. I have the same opinion. Munechika is smart and has composure.”

Shiiba could tell that behind the words was Andou’s trust in Munechika. He thought back to the image he had of Munechika just now.

The man looked strong. A man of stormy good looks. With eyes that looked like they could see through anything. His smile was cynical. Just recalling him inexplicably made Shiiba feel on his guard.

The car stopped at a red light. Looking at the taillights of the car in front, Shiiba muttered to himself, “I don’t like that man.”

Andou heard Shiiba and turned to him, interested.

“That’s odd,” he said. “You never say whether you like or dislike a person.”

“Really?” Shiiba asked, genuinely surprised.

“Yes,” Andou said. “That’s the first time I’ve heard you say something like that.”

It was true that Shiiba rarely expressed his opinions or evaluations of other people. But he genuinely did not like that Munechika. There was no logic to it. There was just something about the man.

That man was dangerous, he felt. Shiiba needed to be careful.

Inside Shiiba's head, a red warning light was silently flashing.

Chapter 3

A black Benz pulled up right in front of Shiiba. The driver politely opened the back door with a white-gloved hand. The person who got out was a well-known politician who was frequently seen on TV. The man disappeared into the famous traditional restaurant.

At nighttime, the leaders of government and financial circles came and went along a small alley that joined Akasaka and Tameikesanou. In a short while, the narrow street would be filled with black cars. Shiiba's eyes came to rest on the restaurant. He generally didn't like high-class restaurants because he couldn't relax in them, but this one looked cozy and had a likeable unpretentiousness about it.

Entering the restaurant through the wicket door, he found himself surrounded by waitresses wearing matching pretty kimonos, brightly welcoming him in.

"Your brother-in-law is already here," one of them said.

Shiiba simply replied, "I see," to the smiling girl. He had left early to make sure that he could arrive before the agreed time, but it seemed he'd still been outdone. That alone depressed him.

The waitress told him that Shinozuka was in the usual room, so he declined being shown the way and went there himself. In front of the sliding door, he re-adjusted his tie. He wasn't in his usual flashy outfit, but in a more standard fitted three-buttoned suit. His hair, which was usually unruly, was now neatly combed.

He called out that he was coming in and opened the door. Sitting there was his brother-in-law, Hideyuki Shinozuka, who was helping himself to some sake.

Shiiba was mesmerized for an instant by the intellectual and clever profile that he hadn't seen in a while. Shiiba secretly thought to himself that there wasn't anyone else upon whom frameless glasses looked as good as on this man.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said by way of greeting.

"No, I'm early," Shinozuka replied. "Don't worry."

Shinozuka took off his suit jacket and then sat down cross-legged on the floor. Even in this relaxed pose, he still managed to retain an air of refinement.

Sitting opposite, Shiiba asked how Shinozuka was while the other man poured sake onto a small cup. Shiiba accepted the glass and lifted it to his lips, but couldn't taste the alcohol properly. He was always nervous around Shinozuka.

"I'm sorry that I never returned any of your phone calls," he said.

Shinozuka had left messages on his answering machine, but he had been so busy he hadn't gotten around to dealing with them. He had thought that his brother-in-law might be angry, but Shinozuka gently smiled and shook his head.

"It's fine," he said. "I know that you're very busy."

When his older sister, Yukari, had just passed away, Shiiba still managed to meet up with Shinozuka every two or three months. Having lost their official relationship as brothers-in-law, Shiiba had thought their relationship strangely ambiguous. Since they had lost that person who had made them related, they were really nothing more than strangers now. But their connection had still not been cut. It was a strange relationship.

"Actually, I have an announcement. I'm being transferred within the Metropolitan Police," Shinozuka said off-handedly, extending his chopsticks out to one of the dishes that had been brought in. He was talking about the police force that had autonomous control over the Tokyo area and functioned to oversee police forces in other areas. All career track civil servants in the police services were first employed by the Metropolitan force. They would later be sent out to one of the other regions.

"Where in the force?" Shiiba asked.

"Planning Unit of the Security Bureau," Shinozuka replied. "I'm going to be a director."

Shiiba nodded and moved his chopsticks. He didn't know what to say. He understood that to be moved to the Planning Unit of the Security Bureau in the Metropolitan Police was a step forward career-wise, but Shinozuka was still only 36. He thought that at that age, it might be too early for Shinozuka to be put in such a role.

The Metropolitan Security Bureau was the base for all public security management across the country. Beginning with the Metropolitan Public Security section, all the detectives in Public Security across the country monitored and gathered information on groups that were involved in extreme acts of criminality or political crimes. Because he worked in intelligence, Shiiba had often cooperated with them, but they went to incomparable extremes.

They were a group specializing in bugging and infiltration methods. They would often conduct secret surveillance that would never be made public, much like a secret police.

One theory was that the Metropolitan Public Security Bureau's Planning Unit was the control tower for all of the S operations done by the Public Security sections across the country. The nature of the highly confidential material that was gathered meant that they would only hire the most capable man as unit director, as that person was effectively going to control the organization.

"You'll be busy soon too," Shiiba said.

"Civil servants never have free time," Shinozuka agreed, smiling quietly.

Even though Shinozuka had managed to jump ahead of so many men who had started their careers at the same time as him, there wasn't even the slightest speck of aggressiveness or arrogance in his manner. Probably for Shinozuka, all of these posts were just stepping-stones for him. That was the terrifying thing. Shinozuka was going to climb to the top of the police organization, all the while with that sedate smile of his.

"I didn't come to talk about me today, though. I have something I need to tell you," Shinozuka confessed. Adjusting his legs, he said, "Masaki, why don't you take the government exam again next year?"

Shiiba was taken aback by this unexpected request.

Shinozuka continued. "Seven years ago, I know that you wanted to work in the field as a police officer and not in an office where you couldn't investigate. But, haven't you had enough? You must be satisfied by now. Please, it's time to think of your future."

"What do you mean?" Shiiba asked, then added, "I plan to keep working as a detective."

His expression hardened. He had a feeling that Shinozuka disagreed with his life choices.

"You are an excellent person," Shinozuka said. "You got top marks in the government exam and you graduated from the Police Academy. As a detective, you have had great success. But those abilities would be much better served and would develop further in the organization. I have always thought that. You are too good a man. You should leave detective work behind you now."

Shinozuka said those words quietly, but there was a surprising strength in his tone. He was saying what he really thought. Shiiba was perplexed.

"Won't you quit the Metropolitan and go back to studying?" Shinozuka

urged. "If you started preparing now, you'll be able to pass next year's exam."

"I can't," Shiiba said after a pause. "Even if I did pass, I wouldn't be employed by the Metropolitan."

In reality, whether you were to be employed was decided before the interview. In an attempt to make the process fairer, the authorities had started making the final results public after the interview day. But that now meant that test results weren't even considered anymore. It wasn't based on how smart you were; it was about which university you went to. For people like Shiiba, there was no way they could compete with the Tokyo University students. Not when there were so few places in the Metropolitan.

"You don't have to worry about that," Shinozuka said. "True, it's unheard of for a detective who has had experience in the field to take the test again to get on the career track, but I heard that the chief said that he wanted to try something new."

Shiiba's face tensed up without him realizing it. Shinozuka could only mean the police chief. The Metropolitan chief stood at the top of 2,070,000 people. Shiiba was struck with awe that Shinozuka now held political sway with someone so high up.

"If you hadn't lost Yukari then you would have been well on your way in a career," Shinozuka said. "Don't you think it's time now to get back to your original course? You don't want to let it pass you by."

Shiiba clenched his fists that rested on his knees. Shinozuka was looking for an answer. Shiiba could simply reject him, but considering that Shinozuka was concerned for his welfare, the words wouldn't come out.

"Let me think about it," he finally replied.

"All right," Shinozuka said. "I hope for a positive answer. Maybe you can follow in my footsteps."



Realizing that he didn't have to give an answer straight away, Shiiba took a deep breath and relaxed. But he was immediately disgusted with himself. Even though he liked to think of himself as a loner, he still couldn't just reject Shinozuka outright.

When dinner was over, they left the restaurant together. Heading out to the street, Shinozuka hailed a taxi.

"Get in," he said.

"Mr. Shinozuka?" Shiiba said.

"I still have some work to do," Shinozuka explained. "I'm going to go back to Kasumigaseki. Masaki, visit me anytime. You're always welcome."

Shinozuka lived alone in a residence in Hanzoumon. When Yukari was alive, they had gone out at night countless times.

"Thank you so much. If I have a chance I'll come over," Shiiba replied rather stiffly and looked at Shinozuka with sad eyes. There was a slight stabbing pain in his chest. They could no longer meet so innocently like they used to. It just wasn't possible anymore.

He sat in the back seat and opened the window.

Shinozuka bent down to whisper to him, "You are so much like Yukari. It always makes me feel sad when I look at you."

Shiiba didn't fully understand the meaning of the words, but because the driver said that he was starting the car, he bowed his head as low as he could. As the car pulled away, he watched as Shinozuka disappeared into the background.

When he could no longer see Shinozuka, Shiiba rested back on the seat and let out a deep sigh. When he thought of Shinozuka, it was with conflict in his heart. Repulsion and aspiration. Dislike and respect. All these emotions mixed together. When he looked into those appraising eyes, he wished in his heart that he could be like Shinozuka.

His sister had been a high school teacher when a friend had introduced her and Shinozuka to each other. They dated for a year, and when Shiiba was in his third year of university, they were married. His sister's marriage was something that had been very welcome to him. His father, who was a police officer, had lost his life when Shiiba had been young. Then, the siblings also lost their mother to cancer when Shiiba was in high school. His older sister, who was four years older than him, became his only family.

At first, Shiiba had greatly admired his brother-in-law who had graduated from the same university and worked at the Metropolitan Police force. It was

because of his admiration for Shinozuka that he had revised his original plan of aiming for the Ministry of Finance and changed to the Metropolitan route. But four years later, straight after passing the government civil servant examination, something had happened to change his mind.

The tragedy had happened when Yukari was walking down Keihana road. A stray bullet fired by a gang member hit Yukari in the skull. It was just bad luck.

The media had played up the story that the wife of a currently serving police worker had been killed, caught up in an ongoing conflict between rival crime organizations.

The Metropolitan department spear-headed a huge search for the culprit. After three days a man had appeared claiming to have done the crime, and the matter had been resolved a little too quickly.

One of the tabloid newspapers had run a story stating that the person who claimed to be the criminal wasn't the real culprit, and that the person who had in fact fired the shot was the son of the head of a particular crime organization. Several innocent citizens had been caught up in that gang feud and paid with their lives. The fight broke out between a couple of domestic crime syndicates and if it had been prolonged any longer, there were fears that even more tragedies would occur. According to the newspaper report, the police had desperately wanted to end the war and the crime organization had not wanted the boss's son apprehended, so the two had come to an agreement behind closed doors.

The report had been easily written off as tabloid nonsense. Shiiba had asked Shinozuka what had really happened. He had heard that a gangster taking the fall for his superiors was not uncommon, and if the real person responsible for his sister's death was still living a normal life, then he could never forgive that.

Shinozuka had told him that there had been no mistakes made in the police reports and that Shiiba shouldn't listen to the exaggerated reports in the media. But Shinozuka had said this with a fixed expression that looked as if he was hiding something. Shiiba knew that Shinozuka himself had doubts about the handling of the case. So he had repeatedly asked that the police re-open the case, re-investigate, and for his sister, discover the truth. However, Shinozuka had just shaken his head and not heard Shiiba's pleas.

"Why? You're a policeman...Please, for the truth, re-open the case."

"Masaki, people who are employed as part of the police organization are still just officials. We don't have the right to just choose what is and isn't

investigated like that.”

He understood Shinozuka’s position. He understood it, but he couldn’t accept it. If it were Shiiba, he would have found a way, no matter what the obstacles were. He wanted to find out the truth for his most beloved innocent sister who had been so unnecessarily murdered. Not as a police officer, but as a man.

Despair turned his vision black, but his disappointment in Shinozuka still shone like a bright light. Shiiba felt knocked down and could only rage at his own impotence.

Because of that, Shiiba had decided to not enter the Metropolitan force. Shinozuka and the other employees at the Metropolitan tried to change his mind, but he ignored them all. Perhaps it was because he resented Shinozuka. Shinozuka was wrong. Shiiba didn’t need a career. He hated crime. He hated the guns that had stolen his sister from him.

So he had chosen a path, which wouldn’t give him a career, but where he could actively prevent crime. He became a nameless police officer.

That will and the hatred towards the murky criminal world were what drove Shiiba on. Not a beautiful high and mighty concept of justice. That he was sure of.

As soon as he got out of the taxi at the Setagaya, which was where he lived, the cell phone in his pocket rang. On the display it said that it was a call from Takasaki, his boss.

Answering the phone, he immediately sensed the panic in Takasaki’s voice as the man asked, “Where are you?”

“At home,” Shiiba replied. “What happened?”

“It’s bad,” Takasaki said. “Andou is dead.”

Upon hearing the unbelievable news, Shiiba was at a loss for words.

“Dead...what do you mean?” he finally asked.

“He’s been killed,” Takasaki explained. “I heard it from another unit. You had put in the system that Andou was under investigation. The body has already been taken in for an autopsy.”

Andou had been killed...

The worst imaginable news. Shiiba’s head was in confusion when he asked Takasaki, “Who was it? Who did it?”

“We haven’t caught him yet,” Takasaki said. “According to the witness statement of someone named Nishi, Andou was attacked suddenly when he got out of the car. The other team has some stuff that they want to ask you so

can you come to the Shinjuku station?"

"Yes, I'm heading there now." Shiiba continued talking as he walked towards the station. "Do we have any potential culprits?"

"No, they don't know anything yet," Takasaki said. "It's just that Andou's men said that it may be a Chinese man."

"Chinese...?" Shiiba stopped in his tracks. A cold sensation filled his chest.

"When he was attacked, apparently the attacker screamed something in Chinese," Takasaki said. "Right after that, the shots were fired so Nishi didn't get a good look at the culprit's face."

"Shots...Andou was shot dead?" Shiiba asked.

"Yes, in the head and chest, he died almost instantly."

A Chinese man. A gun. These familiar keywords shot through all of Shiiba's thought processes. Could it be what Shiiba thought? That there had been some kind of trouble between Andou and Ying Fa Lin and that was why he'd been killed?

"I'll see you at the Shinjuku station. I'll be there A.S.A.P."

He hung up. His legs wouldn't move, it was as if they'd been tied together. Still clutching the cell phone in his hand, he looked up into the night sky, stunned.

"Mr. Shibano!"

Clutching a bag in his arms, Nishi jumped up upon seeing Shiiba.

"Nishi, are you all right? Are you hurt?" Shiiba inquired immediately.

Other members of the family, including Yumi and Toshiaki, were in Andou's office. There was an indescribable atmosphere of pain among the seated people.

"I'm fine. The boss, Mr. Andou, he..." Nishi couldn't finish his words.

Shiiba patted him on the back. Upon seeing the shock and confusion caused by Andou's murder, Shiiba couldn't find the words to console him.

Nishi had phoned when Shiiba was explaining everything he knew about Andou's business dealings to a Shinjuku detective. Pretending that he had just heard the tragic news about Andou, Shiiba had gone straight away to the office, and then to Kabuki-cho.

"It's terrible," Shiiba murmured. "I still can't believe it."

"How could this happen..." Nishi said. "He was such a good man..."

Seeing the grown man cry, the other people started to sniff too. Shiiba was also sad, but he wasn't in the mood to cry with others over his pain. It was possibly because Andou was an S that he was murdered.

"Who was it that shot Andou?" he asked. "They were saying it might be a Chinese man."

"As soon as he got out of the car, he heard someone shout in Chinese," Nishi managed to explain. "He didn't have time to turn around before he was shot in the back, so I never saw the man's face. Of course, there is a possibility that the culprit was Chinese, but that's not definite. Mr. Shibano, what are we going to do from now on?"

Shiiba shook Nishi's shoulders. Nishi's face was full of fear and worry. Now that Andou was gone, only Nishi could run the organization.

"The shops all have their own managers," Shiiba said. "Leave them to run everything as usual. It would be best to stop all the background activities for now. The police are going to be looking around. Take care of anything that you don't want them to see around here."

"That's all fine," Nishi said. "Last week, the boss moved everything to a safe place."

Andou had done just as Shiiba had suggested when they had thought that a drug official might be following Andou. Perhaps this stalker was linked to Andou's death. Shiiba hid from his expression the fear that he had for himself.

"The Matsukura Group, we should let them know too?" Nishi asked. "I haven't contacted them yet."

It was important that this was done properly. Nishi would naturally shy away from all that, not being familiar with the gangs himself.

"That's right," Shiiba agreed. "They've always helped out, we should let them know."

"But I don't know the group well enough," Nishi said. "I only know Munechika."

Shiiba frowned. "Munechika? I met him once too. Does that yakuza come here often?"

"No," Nishi said. "Only a few times. I've only spoken a few words to him, but he was a childhood friend of the boss'."

"Yes, I knew Andou for a long time," a new voice from behind said.

Shiiba swung around in surprise. Munechika stood at the door in a black double-breasted suit. Shiiba had no idea when the man had come. Behind him

was Kaname.

Nishi was also surprised at Munechika's sudden appearance. His eyes opened wide.

"Your name is Nishi, right?" Munechika inquired.

"Ah, yes," Nishi replied.

"I will let the organization know," Munechika said. "If there are any problems, don't go to the organization, come directly to me. I will do my best."

Munechika gave over his business card, in a relaxed style.

Nishi accepted it. "Thank you so much," he said, bowing.

"Andou's body?" Munechika asked.

"It's in autopsy," Nishi replied.

"Being cut up. Terrible," Munechika whispered. "If his body comes back, let me know." Then in the same way as he had come, he suddenly left the office.

Shiiba flew out into the corridor to follow him.

"Wait," he called out.

Munechika slowly turned around. But before Shiiba could get a word in, Munechika spoke.

"I told you to be careful with Andou," he hissed. "You should listen to advice."

Munechika looked at Shiiba with a glare that could cut the air. Shiiba drew in a deep breath. He finally understood the meaning behind those words. Munechika had not been saying that Andou would betray Shiiba, but the man had been letting him know that there was a lot of danger facing Andou.

"You...you know something!" Shiiba exclaimed. "You know who killed Andou?" He grabbed the other man violently, but Munechika was unperturbed and only looked down at him. "Who is it? If you know, tell me! Who was following Andou? Who murdered him?"

"Is that how you should ask someone?" Munechika asked. He shook off Shiiba's arms, slightly annoyed. "You're just a little baby lost in a world you know nothing of. Or, maybe a little girl?" he scoffed. Then he drew his face close to Shiiba's. "I know who killed Andou. If you want me to tell you who it is, then it is going to take more than information. Do you understand?"

Munechika was asking for money. The lowest of the low. Shiiba despised him internally.

"How much do you want?" he asked through clenched teeth.

“As if I needed money,” Munechika sneered.

This sudden reply made Shiiba raise his eyebrows. Then what the hell did Munechika want?

“You,” Munechika said.

“What...?” Shiiba asked.

“You’re not very bright, are you?” Munechika mocked. “I want you. You look so clean, you must know how to please a man.”

The words were making no sense to Shiiba, so he pushed the man away. Munechika slapped him lightly on the cheek.

“You piece of shit...” Shiiba growled.

Munechika didn’t budge an inch. Instead, a thin smile crept over his lips.

“Hard-nosed little girl,” he said.

“STOP!” Shiiba yelled.

Even under Shiiba’s harsh glare, Munechika looked down at him, relaxed. He almost seemed fascinated by Shiiba’s rage.

Kaname got into the elevator. Holding the button, he waited for Munechika.

“I’ll keep the information,” Munechika said. “So if you want it, come over to my house, anytime.”

Munechika pushed Shiiba aside and then got into the elevator too.

Shiiba swore at his back. “Like I’d ever want that! You’re a sick bastard!”

There was no reply and Munechika disappeared behind the elevator’s doors. That jeering smile stayed on his face until the end.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” Oosako said, hurrying into the café they had arranged to meet at. He bowed his head in apology.

“I only just got here too,” Shiiba said.

Oosako laughed at him, calling him a liar. There was no point trying to assure the man. The ashtray was already full of ash.

“No, I’ve really only been here a while,” Shiiba insisted.

Oosako observed that he was smoking a lot more and Shiiba put out the cigarette. The truth was that he had been waiting for over 30 minutes, but he didn’t want to make Oosako feel bad for his tardiness since the man had come all the way from Ichigaya.

It was a café in the basement of a building on Sotobori Street. It was a

gloomy little café with a very dimly lit interior. There was one other customer who looked like a middle-aged white-collar worker. The man was sitting near the entrance and was reading a weekly, looking like he was going to fall asleep at any moment. It wasn't popular, but that made it a good place to talk, as they were unlikely to be overheard.

A cantankerous old man took Oosako's order.

"I'm sorry to call you to a place like this," Shiiba said.

Asking for coffee, Oosako shook his head, saying that it wasn't a problem.

"People may recognize us in Shinjuku, so that's why I asked you here," Shiiba explained, continuing with the formalities. Then he took a brown envelope that was offered to him. Opening it, he took out Munechika's background report written in Oosako's familiar scrawl.

Oosako listed off what was written. "Keigo Munechika. 32. Up and coming young businessman. Legitimate businesses are real estate, IT, and imports. In the background, as you know, he has an important position in the Matsukura Group. According to inside information from the group, it seems that he is also the illegitimate child of the previous president."

"I heard that too," Shiiba murmured. "His half-brother inherited the group, didn't he?"

"The formal wife's child is 25 or 26," Oosako said. "After the death of his father, they had someone else stand in to handle operations. It sounds like he didn't actually succeed his father until last year. There are a lot of bloodthirsty men in Shinjuku. The young president couldn't really handle the organization. However, back to Munechika. There are a lot of mysteries surrounding him. When he was young, there was a time when he lived with his father, but for some reason, he wasn't publicly acknowledged, and doesn't carry the Matsukura name. After graduating high school, he left home and seemed to have not been part of the organized crime scene during that time. Four years later, he suddenly re-appeared as a businessman involved with the Matsukura Group. He seems to have acquired quite a lot of money now."

The coffee came, so Oosako stopped talking for a moment.

"He is certainly one tough customer," Shiiba said, nodding. "I asked the data center for his crime record, but he doesn't have one."

"So he's cautious," Oosako said. "Because he's just a member, he hasn't stepped out onto the organization's main stage. According to his gangster

colleagues, he's not entirely devoted to illegitimate business causes. What do you want with Munechika?"

Shiiba was hesitant, not knowing how he should answer. But perhaps Oosako could help him out again later. Shiiba checked to see that there was no one listening. Oosako also had experience with undercover operations so he understood the difficult position that Shiiba was in.

"The other day, someone was killed," he whispered. "It was Andou, who ran the bathhouses."

"Oh, that," Oosako said. "They still haven't caught who did it."

It had been over a week since Andou's death, and there had still been no progress with the investigation. Shiiba's frustration had only increased.

"Andou was my S," Shiiba admitted after a pause.

With the cup to his lips, Oosako looked up surprised.

"I see," he murmured. "That is unfortunate. But what does Munechika have to do with this?"

"I don't know," Shiiba said. "But I think he knows something."

He didn't say that Andou may have lost his life because he was an S.

That night, he had met with Takasaki and told him that he couldn't tell the detectives of Unit 1 that Andou had been meeting with Lin. Takasaki also suspected that Lin was involved in Andou's murder. Even if Lin wasn't the person who did it, if Unit 1's detectives started sniffing around, then the man would likely flee. And because to COC5 the disclosure of gun trafficking routes was more important than a murder, the actual arrest would fall to Unit 1.

"Murder is Unit 1's job, isn't it?" Oosako objected with a pained face. He gulped down his coffee. "I understand your frustration, but you shouldn't just go around doing what you want. Leave it alone."

"Yes," Shiiba said.

Although he agreed, Shiiba still felt uneasy in his heart. He needed to know the truth about Andou's murder. Even if he couldn't investigate, he wanted to have the truth now. Who killed Andou? Was it because he was an S? What had he done? Why...

A burning pain shot through his body. Not a single muscle could relax.

There was only one person who knew the truth. That man was Keigo Munechika.

Chapter 4

“Hey, you came.”

Keigo Munechika smiled arrogantly. However many times Shiiba saw that face, he couldn't get used to it.

“Yes, I'm here,” he said.

“Thank you,” Munechika drawled.

Behind him, Kaname said a quick word then turned on his heels. Shiiba was left alone in the entrance hall and Munechika nodded for him to come in. Following Munechika, Shiiba stepped into the room.

It was a spacious living room. The decorations were well designed and expensive looking. It was a polished place to the point of being unnatural, like it had never been used. It didn't feel like anyone actually lived there. It was like a model home, built to be admired.

Outside the floor-to-ceiling windows, you could see Tokyo Tower lit up, but Shiiba was not in the mood to enjoy the spectacular night view.

Munechika's residence was in Roppongi Hills. Shiiba had called the number on the business card that Munechika had left with Nishi. Munechika himself had not picked up. The man who was his secretary, Kaname, had answered the call. Shiiba had said that he wanted to meet with Munechika, and Kaname had, in the next hour, sent a car to pick him up from Shinjuku.

“You have an excellent man there,” Shiiba said.

“Kaname? He is my most valuable asset,” Munechika replied.

Shiiba felt that he understood Munechika's words. Kaname didn't talk too much, but he always answered correctly. He didn't look that much different in age from Shiiba, but his calmness made him seem a lot older.

With his hands still thrust into the pockets of his fake fur coat, Shiiba proceeded to the back of the room and, without permission, sat down on the sofa. It was a large sofa with leather upholstery and was soft and comfortable to sit on.

“Something to drink?” Munechika offered.

“I'm fine,” Shiiba said.

He didn't come here for a friendly drink. Shiiba had only one purpose.

“Who killed Andou?” he demanded straight away. “Tell me.”

Munechika remained standing. He looked down at Shiiba.

“Still rude,” he said. “When you ask someone something, you should at least say please.”

“This isn’t a request,” Shiiba said. “This is a transaction. We are on even ground.”

Munechika raised one eyebrow, trying to guess Shiiba’s meaning.

“Then you are ready to service me then?” he asked.

Irritated, Shiiba stayed silent, but reluctantly nodded. He didn’t want to speak too much. If he chatted, then that would only increase his misery.

He had hesitated and tormented himself. But the overwhelming desire to obtain the truth had brought him here. He had convinced himself that he could give himself to a man, and decided to meet with Munechika.

“I have no intention of spending time over this transaction,” he said. “Let’s begin.”

Seeing Shiiba starting to take off his coat, Munechika smiled. “An impatient guy...well, fine with me. Come here.”

The place that Munechika indicated was, as expected, the bedroom, which was ridiculously large. Walking into the center of the room, Shiiba saw a king-sized bed. Seeing what was decorating the wall, he stopped.

In a glass case were displayed guns. A Walther, Browning Hi-Power, Colt Government, Beretta, Magnum, Tokarev, Desert Eagle. All the famous brands were displayed all across the wall.

“They’re not the real things, are they?” he asked.

Munechika replied, “Of course not.”

“They say to hide a leaf, put it in a forest,” Shiiba quoted.

“Don’t worry,” Munechika said. “They’re all model guns.”

“You like guns?” Shiiba asked.

“No, they were all given to me by a friend,” Munechika clarified. “I thought they’d make interesting decorations. I don’t usually take an interest in such playthings, but they’re still very elaborate. Here, what do you think of this one?” Munechika opened the glass door and took one out. “Look. This Beretta, it’s some workmanship.”

It was a Pietro Beretta M92. Italian made. A manual 9mm. It was widely used across the world by police and armed forces, and was standard issue for the American army.

Munechika slowly raised the gun grasped in his right hand, aiming it at Shiiba’s nose. Even if it was a fake, he couldn’t help but be a little bit worried.

“Well, shall we start this transaction?” Munechika said. “I said in the beginning, you are not in charge. The information will come at the end.”

Not understanding, Shiiba frowned. “What do you mean?”

Munechika smiled, then pushed the Beretta against Shiiba’s cheek. “I want to enjoy myself. I want to spend as much time as it takes to be satisfied, then I will give you the information. Take off your clothes and lie down.”

Shiiba controlled himself. He would give his body to this man. For a little while, he would let Munechika do what he wanted. That’s how he had to think about it. Of course, he really didn’t want to let this man enjoy himself on him.

“What do we do?” he asked.

Munechika was now stroking Shiiba’s cheek with the cold hard pistol. Perhaps because of the coldness of the metal, a shiver ran through Shiiba’s body.

“Seems you’re not into this,” Munechika said. “If you don’t want to, then you can go home.”

The man was trying to provoke him. The urge to react was strong, and when Shiiba moved his face, the Beretta was right in front of his eyes. He opened his lips and slowly started to lick along the shaft of the pistol. The uncomfortable taste of metal filled his mouth, but ignoring that, he took the mouth of the pistol into his own and sucked on it.

Taking the pistol away, Munechika whispered gently to him, “Is this how you treat your own Beretta?” Then he suddenly started to shake with laughter. It seems that Shiiba’s sudden actions had been amusing. “Unfortunately, I’m no Beretta, I’m a Magnum,” he said.

Ignoring the slimy line, Shiiba asked him, “Do you like men?”

“No,” Munechika readily replied. “I’m not turned on by men usually. But I am interested in you. It’s because you were the one that that square Andou loved. When did you become Andou’s woman?”

It was strange that Munechika had such a strong conviction to ask. Shiiba didn’t think Andou would have said that.

“I wasn’t Andou’s ‘woman,’” he explained. “We didn’t have that kind of relationship, ever.”

“Liar. Andou was obsessed with you,” Munechika said.

“I’m not lying,” Shiiba said. “This is the truth. There was nothing between Andou and me. Really.”

“Then, there were men other than Andou?” Munechika probed.

Enraged that Munechika had decided that Shiiba must be gay, it took all he had to just quietly shake his head.

“I’m straight,” he said. “I’ve never even thought of being with a man before.”

Munechika was silent for a few moments and then suddenly threw the Beretta he’d been holding down on the bed and muttered that this was boring.

“If you weren’t Andou’s woman then I don’t want it anymore,” he said. “Go home.”

The one panicked now was Shiiba. He still hadn’t found out who had killed Andou.

“Wait,” he said. “You wanted me here! The deal!”

“There is no deal,” Munechika said. “An innocent boy isn’t going to be fun. I’m not interested in virgins. Unripe fruit is never sweet enough for me.”

As Munechika tried to leave the room, Shiiba threw himself against the man. This was a joke. He couldn’t have come all this way to be simply rejected.

“Don’t play with me!” he yelled. “You said we had a deal! Just because you made a mistake with the relationship Andou and I had...you have to stick to the deal.”

Munechika looked down at Shiiba who was now showing a mixture of rage and desperation. Letting out a slight sigh, he said, “Fine. I was the one who said it. I’ll keep my promise. Hurry up and begin. Take off your clothes and sit on the bed. Look at me, and then jerk yourself off. When you’re done, I’ll tell you what you want to know. You have 10 minutes. Get to it.”

Shiiba took in the rapid orders.

Giving Shiiba a sideways glance, Munechika sat down heavily on the sofa. He was going to watch from there.

“Time is ticking. Go.”

Munechika crossed his long legs. He seemed tired of this.

Shiiba bit down on his lip. He had to do it.

Dropping his coat to the floor, he took off his black turtleneck. But, when he pulled down his pants, his hands hesitated on his underwear.

“Don’t rush it,” Munechika said. “Enjoy it.”

His face was flushed with embarrassment, but pushing the doubt down, Shiiba took off the last item of clothing.

“Nice body.”

Munechika's words were ridiculing him. Shiiba looked up, resolution so apparent on his face that it could almost be considered defiance. He didn't feel shame. And even if he did, he wasn't going to show it in front of this man.

"Sit facing me," Munechika ordered. "Open your legs a little more. That's right."

He sat facing Munechika on the bed. Then, he took his member and started rubbing it roughly. But, in his current state of rage, there was no way that he was going to manage an erection. The male organ was delicate. And pleasuring yourself in front of a complete stranger wasn't going to be exciting unless you were really perverted.

"What's the matter?" Munechika taunted. "Can't get it up? You'll run out of time."

“Shut up!” Shiiba growled. He said it from the corner of his lips, trying to concentrate on the matter at hand.

“Let me help you,” Munechika said. “I’ll give you a word of advice. Use your imagination. If you don’t, you’ll never get it up.”

Shiiba wanted to scream back that that wasn’t going to be much help either, but he wasn’t in a position to do that. Glaring at Munechika, he let out a deep sigh. He had to calm down first. If he tried too hard, then he was never going to get anywhere.

“Use your imagination,” Munechika repeated. “I know that you really like men deep inside. You’ve never told anyone, but deep down, you like men. Large male hands caressing your body. You can’t help but want it. It’s your true desire.”

Shiiba looked up and checked the time on the clock hanging on the wall. Three minutes had already passed. He wasn’t going to be able to shoot off like this. He’d lose the deal.

“A male hand, holding your cock,” Munechika continued. “Slowly moving up and down. Surges of pleasure. The heat building, your dick hardening. It feels so good.”

Shiiba closed his eyes, and something floated up in his mind’s eye. A memory of an adult video that had been buried deep in his mind. The image of a beautiful naked woman slowly formed on his eyelids, but Munechika suddenly told him not to close his eyes. The image was ruined.

“Look only at me,” Munechika ordered. “That’s right. If you don’t, the deal is off.”

He looked at Munechika full of hatred. Munechika told him to continue. He didn’t want to admit it, but Munechika’s baritone voice was attractive as he continued his monologue, “The man’s hand is turning you on. Moving up and down, up and down, your cock is starting to leak little drips. Little drips that start to run down his hand, it’s so dirty.”

Looking into Munechika’s eyes was making it difficult for Shiiba to think of other things. Jerking himself off required concentration. Without the chance to do that, he wasn’t going to be able to get hard.

He began to realize that if he wanted to get pleasure, then he had no other option but to surrender to Munechika. It wasn’t what he wanted, but it was the only way. Shiiba made up his mind. Next time Munechika spat out those foul words, he was going to try and listen.

He liked men. He needed sex with them. He wanted to do naughty things to them. Using Munechika's words, he started to make up his own images. It was a kind of self-brainwashing.

"He starts to suck on your nipples. You like it. Him nibbling on them feels so good. Not only that. You want your own penis nibbled. You want your hard cock nibbled so badly. You want it licked. You want it sucked off."

He was imagining it. Being turned on by a man sucking on him. The unrealistic thoughts twisted his will, and with the improper thoughts, he started to move his hand freely. The images were starting to arouse him. Slowly, his member was getting harder in his hand.

"Finally, he licks your dick. You can't take it. You cry out because it feels so good. He's excited too by your cries of pleasure, and he continues with the rough blowjob. You're starting to leak semen into his mouth. You think you're going to come, but you try to hold on to it."

His heart was pounding faster. He had to catch this wave, and stick with it to the end.

Shiiba surrendered himself to the imaginary world. He was imagining the man going down on him. He was hot. His breath was quick. Oddly, the more he thought of the image, the more it started to turn him on. Even Munechika's gaze on Shiiba started to become a turn on.

"The man's tongue starts to look for something even deeper. You say that you don't like it, but you're so excited. You really want it. You want a rim job. You're dripping, you want him to bury his own penis inside you."

For an instant, Shiiba's hand stopped. Munechika whispered to him to continue.

"The man does what you want and pushes against you. You accept him and open your legs wide to let him in. He penetrates you. Filling you up. It feels so good. He's taking you as if you were a woman, you cry out in delight."

Shiiba could see it in his mind's eye. The man was holding him. Penetrating him. Shiiba was embarrassed. Ashamed. But, like a nightmare, he was only getting more excited. As if Munechika was manipulating Shiiba with his cold hard stare.

"You're feeling the man inside you and he isn't showing you any mercy. He's pounding into you, and you can't think of anything else anymore. You can barely breathe. But still, you want him to fuck you more. Harder. Deeper. You scream at him to pound you so hard you'll never walk again. His dick is all the

way up your ass, he's grabbing at your hips. Until finally, the warm spurt comes spraying all over."



At the conclusion to Munechika's story, Shiiba erupted like a hot volcano. His hand was suddenly full of white sticky liquid. The pangs of gratification caused small convulsions in his stomach muscles. It was an entirely different feeling from when he jerked himself off alone.

"In 9 minutes 42 seconds," Munechika drawled. "Good boy. Made it within the time limit."

Shiiba's breath was reverberating in his chest. He reached for the tissues on the bedside table. Finally finished, he lifted his worn out body and picked up his clothes from the floor.

It had been good.

Along with the exhaustion, he also had a sense of defeat that was difficult to explain.

What was he doing? To sink to this level? Why did he want to know who had killed Andou? What had he been waiting for?

Munechika watched Shiiba's languid movements and took out a photo. He watched as Shiiba took it and looked at it. It was the face of a stern-looking man in his late 20s.

"Bao Sen Ma. He killed Andou."

Shiiba's eyes opened wide. He turned to Munechika. Munechika looked back at him. His thin smile, that had until now been there, disappeared.

"Why did he kill Andou?" Shiiba asked.

"Simple grudge that had to do with drug sales," Munechika explained. "Andou had started getting merchandise from somewhere else. He'd been getting purer drugs from North Korea and having them smuggled into Japan through Asia. He was originally going to have the Taiwanese mafia smuggle it from the continent to Japan, but talks didn't go well and, in the end, the Hong Kong mafia did it. That's the basic story."

Shiiba was secretly flabbergasted. He had never imagined that Andou's operations had run that far and wide. He had overstretched himself.

"Then, this Ma, he's Taiwanese mafia?" he asked.

"Yeah," Munechika answered. "The Taiwanese mafia had the job stolen from them. The two organizations already had a strong rivalry, and Andou got in too deep. It seems that Andou was killed as a warning to others."

There were countless Chinese mafia employees in Kabuki-cho. They worked for organizations from Shanghai, Beijing, Fujian, Hong Kong and Taiwan. These organizations were often in conflict with each other. The members of those organizations were mostly illegal immigrants. Investigating

these people who were not on any official registers was like chasing shadows, so it was impossible to ever truly understand the organizations.

Shiiba was still full of rage. He glared at Munechika. “You knew that though. Even the Matsukura Group was aware of the danger Andou was in. Why didn’t you protect him?”

“It’s all easy for you to say,” Munechika said. “There isn’t a yakuza stupid enough to get in a fight with the Chinese. They have dirty methods, you should know that.”

It was as Munechika said. The Chinese mafia only came to Japan to earn money. Robbery, smuggling, and trafficking were nothing more than business to them. Their motto was “Yao qian, bu yao min.” Life is not important if you want money. It meant that you could kill for money. It reduced the brutality of it all and made it more business-like.

Knowing that still wasn’t going to appease the growing wave of anger inside. Shiiba continued to glare accusingly at Munechika.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Munechika muttered, scowling back. “I thought I did the only thing I could. I knew that the people who disagreed with Andou were those in the Chu Lien Pang clan so I talked to people I knew in Taiwan who came from that organization. I thought the matter had already been dealt with.”

The Chu Lien Pang was the largest of the Taiwanese crime groups. There were plenty of active members working in Japan. However, the orders from the upper levels probably never reached those members who were working alone in Japan.

“Andou knew he was in danger?” Shiiba asked.

“Lots of worrisome things happened, but I don’t think he thought that they were trying to kill him,” Munechika said. “The last thing he did was to take steps to move his money. He ordered me to be on my guard.”

Munechika’s expression looked depressed and Shiiba thought that the man was probably regretting not talking directly to Andou now. If only a little, his dislike of the other man decreased.

“Ma was a member of the organization that killed Andou,” Munechika said. “He’s probably not registered here. He’s an old member of the organization, but it seems that he’s not a favorite of his colleagues. On the back of the photo is the address of the apartment that Ma hangs out in.”

“How did you get so much information?” Shiiba asked. “It’s not easy to

find things out about the Taiwanese mafia.”

Even the police found it difficult to gather information on foreign crime syndicates. A different kind of warning was going off in Shiiba’s head. He looked intently at Munechika. Munechika just laughed back at him.

“I have my ways,” he said. “But, that is all you need to know. Do with the information what you will.”

Munechika ran his finger down Shiiba’s cheek. Shiiba put the photo into his breast pocket.

“Thank you, I will,” he said.

He walked to the door. The deal was complete. He no longer needed this man or this room.

When Shiiba put his hand out to turn the doorknob, Munechika called out to him. He looked back.

“It was something,” Munechika said nonchalantly. “A serving police officer masturbating, not something you see every day.”

Shiiba felt like giving the man a flying kick to the face. Munechika had known who Shiiba was all along.

“You asked Andou?” he asked incredulously.

“No, I found out myself,” Munechika replied. “Andou was your informant, wasn’t he? I thought that maybe you two were sleeping together, but you said that your relationship was platonic. He was really a cruel man underneath it all, regardless of what you saw in him.” Munechika threw in some cruel sarcasm, giving a light laugh. “You did well to get a stingy man like that to help you out with no reward.”

Shiiba was chilled by the look in the man’s eyes. Munechika wasn’t trying to make a fool of him, the man actually hated Shiiba.

“Andou was different from a jerk like you,” Shiiba spat.

“You are the same as me,” Munechika countered. “We knew how he felt and we used him. You have some balls, little girl.”

Shiiba went red with rage. He couldn’t stand to see this man’s face for one more second. He opened the door and left the room.

“Take care going home, Detective Shiiba,” he heard Munechika’s laughing voice say behind him.

Ignoring it, he slammed the door with all his might. He kicked it behind him for good measure. The tantrum, of course, didn’t do anything to ease his rage.

Entering the room, Takasaki let him know the good news: “Shiiba, we got

Ma.”

The room was in the apartment block that was the center for the Matsuda team. Receiving Takasaki’s call, Shiiba had come straight away.

“Really? That was fast,” Shiiba said.

He had heard two days ago that Ma had been arrested in possession of drugs. It had been the result of the information that Munechika had given him that Unit 1 had been able to act on. It was for another crime, but when they searched his home, they found a weapon that they suspected had been used in the murder of Andou. Even Ma would have now resigned himself to his fate.

However, Shiiba thought that Ma probably wasn’t talking about what actually led to Andou’s murder. He would be insisting that it was a personal grudge against Andou, to protect his gang.

Takasaki had cheered up a little, but Shiiba couldn’t share in the celebration just yet. Takasaki was happy, not that they had caught Andou’s killer, but because that meant that they weren’t going to be snooping around Ying Fa Lin. To the people above, Andou was just an S, a pawn that they could discard.

But Shiiba had no right to reproach Takasaki for his lack of emotion. If you started accusing people of being selfish, Shiiba would come under fire too.

When Shiiba had found out that Andou’s killer had been Taiwanese Mafia and the man’s death had nothing to do with his work as an S, he had been relieved. He had felt a huge weight lifted from his shoulders.

He couldn’t help but feel a little bad about that.

The truth was that Andou had still been killed. But Shiiba had been released from his feelings of guilt. It wasn’t something to be proud of. Even that ridiculous deal he had entered into with Munechika to get that information he wanted so badly was all for himself.

“What’s happening with Lin?” Takasaki asked.

“When he gets back in the country I’ll try to contact him,” Shiiba promised.

“Be careful,” Takasaki warned. “If you need help, call me. We need to be very careful around Lin until he parts with a piece of information worthy of handing to the Incidents Team.”

After discussing how they were going to contact Lin, the conversation dropped off. Takasaki started on a topic that Shiiba himself would never have considered.

“Now that Andou is gone, what are you going to do? Your other

informants are just small fry. You need to find a new S.”

“A new S?” Shiiba asked, surprised.

“Yes, how about Keigo Munechika?” Takasaki suggested. “He seems like he would make a good S.”

It was unbelievable. Shiiba yelled without realizing, “Stop it! That man could never be my S!”

“Why? He’s in the Matsukura Group, and he’s a businessman so he has a lot of connections,” Takasaki pointed out. “He’s knowledgeable on the criminal underworld, and he also works in an import company. He’s ideal. Anyway, even knowing that you were a detective, he still got you that information on Ma. That’s a pretty cooperative S already.”

How is that guy even remotely cooperative? Shiiba screamed internally. Of course, he hadn’t told Takasaki any of what had happened between him and Munechika. He hadn’t told him anything more than that a man of the Matsukura Group who knew Andou had given him some valuable information on the murder.

The idea of Munechika being his S made Shiiba want to vomit. The man had known that he was a detective, but still made him do that perverted stuff. Munechika clearly had contempt for the police. Furthermore, Munechika hadn’t gotten his hands dirty, but still shamed Shiiba through looks and words. It would have been so much better just to have had sex. The man was really messed up.

“You know that it’s difficult to get an S,” Takasaki said. “It usually takes years for things to get to the stage where you can use him as an S. But, Munechika came to you himself, so it’s going to speed things up. He might be too much of a big shot, but don’t overlook him.”

What Takasaki said was right. To get an S was the job of Shiiba and the other detectives in his team. An S wasn’t a form of investigation. It was a way of bringing yourself closer to the target. It felt like the reverse of what you should do, but that was what it was.

Having an S was like fishing with cormorants. The fishermen use birds to fish, but they first train the birds, and that training is essential. It was the same as undercover detective work. If you flew into the river yourself you would never catch a single fish. But a valuable bird could get you information on the fish. That was why you needed an S.

Shiiba knew it, but he wanted to choose what kind of bird to raise. His superiors had no idea what kind of man was most suited for the job.

“You have to take Keigo Munechika,” Takasaki repeated.

When Shiiba showed no reaction, Takasaki looked sternly at him. “All right? Shiiba? This is an order. You’ll start tomorrow.”

Shiiba could only nod. Even though he wasn’t happy, even though he couldn’t accept it, a superior’s order was absolute. Shiiba could not object.

Chapter 5

He had to obey orders.

The first thing that he did was tail Munechika. Shiiba had already investigated Munechika's basic personality, but he still needed to find out what the man did everyday, his interests, his preferences, the money he borrowed, and his personal relationships. Shiiba needed to know anything that would help him understand Munechika as a man. When trying to obtain an S, you had to start researching from the very bottom.

On the outside, Munechika looked like an ordinary businessman. In the morning he would leave for work, at night, he would come home. He did a lot of entertaining as part of the job. Almost everyday, he would eat or go drinking with someone. The one thing that Shiiba knew was that Munechika had a young assistant, who would frequently meet with the other members of crime groups.

After watching Munechika for over 10 days, Shiiba still hadn't been able to discern any particularly unusual behavior. This wasn't going to progress Shiiba's assignment. He didn't want to bring private affairs to his job, but he disliked what he disliked. It depressed him. Knowing that he was one of those men that put his personal feelings before the job made him really begin to hate himself.

Consumed by his feelings of self-hatred, Shiiba stood guard that night, as he did every night, over Munechika. He was in front of a classy club in Ginza. He would be recognized so he didn't go in.

There were lots of people drinking, but this part of the city was worlds apart from Kabuki-cho. Men disappeared into the building with beautiful hostesses in their arms. Flashy women were standing out on the streets to wave to customers. There were expensive cars and taxis lined up as far as the eye could see.

Shiiba was standing in the shadow of a deserted building under the cold winter sky. Finally, Munechika came out. He wasn't alone. Tonight, he had a young girl with him. In front of them, the black Benz driven by Kaname pulled up.

Shiiba jumped into the taxi that he had paid to wait for him and told the driver to follow the Benz. The Benz with Munechika and the girl in it took off. The taxi that Shiiba was in followed a few cars behind. The Benz went from

Showa Street, to the 405 and then on to Roppongi Street. It looked like they were headed for Munechika's place.

Munechika was really doing well financially if he was able to take a hostess home from a fancy club. Shiiba stared at the Benz in front, his heart filled with resentment. But, if the girl was Munechika's lover, then that could be a resource he could use. Shiiba had to find out everything he could about Munechika. After a short while, the Benz pulled up at Munechika's Roppongi residence. Seeing the Benz enter the underground parking lot, Shiiba got out of the taxi. He was on one of the roads that were on the south side of Roppongi Hills. He looked around, just a little bit ahead was a park. Hiding himself in the shadows of the park's trees, he watched the entrance to the parking lot.

He planned to stay there until the girl went home, but if he was unlucky, he might be there until morning. Shiiba would have to buy some hot coffee. However, after only taking a few steps towards the vending machine, the cellular phone in his pocket started to vibrate. The number on the display didn't look familiar. Shiiba's eyes were fixed on the house as he answered the phone.

"You won't give up, will you? Do you plan to follow me forever?"

It was Munechika's voice.

Shiiba had been so careful. There was no way Munechika could have noticed. And Shiiba had never told the man this cell phone number.

"Come on up," Munechika continued. "I'll make you some coffee." This man seemed to have eyes everywhere. "See you."

Munechika hung up.

Shiiba returned the phone to his pocket and set off determinedly towards the building's front entrance. He exchanged greetings with the guard and the doorman and pushed the intercom. It connected him straight to the front reception where they asked for the name and room number of the person he was visiting.

He was let in. He walked through a large corridor that was decorated like an art museum. He waited there for the building personnel to make the relevant checks with Munechika. Finally, he got into the elevator.

The luxury elevator ascended silently. Inside, Shiiba was nervous. This would be his first meeting trying to get Munechika to be an S. It was a chance for him to improve their relationship.

He should have been feeling tense, but he was feeling depressed. He knew the reason. Shiiba should have had the upper hand on Munechika, but he

hadn't from the onset. If he was to gain the advantage now, he would have to take action. He may not get another chance later on.

Standing in front of Munechika's room, Shiiba closed his eyes and forced himself to calm down. Right now, all he could do was to get to know Munechika better, and find a way to use him as an S.

When he pushed the intercom button, Munechika immediately appeared. He looked a lot younger now, perhaps because he had changed into jeans and a sweater.

Entering the hall, Shiiba quickly looked around on the floor, but there wasn't a pair of women's shoes to be seen.

"You had a woman with you?" he asked.

"Kaname took her home," Munechika clarified.

So only Munechika had gotten out of the Benz in the parking lot. However, Shiiba wasn't satisfied with that explanation. Why hadn't they taken her home first? Shiiba asked that question, and Munechika grinned a dirty grin.

"I was intending to have some fun with her all night, but I changed my mind halfway through. I felt sorry for you out there all alone."

"Don't lie to me," Shiiba snapped. "I bet you just got bored and dumped her."

They entered the living room. Munechika disappeared into the kitchen and re-appeared holding a pot of coffee and two cups.

"Drink," he said. "It'll warm you up."

Munechika poured coffee into the two simple, unadorned cups. From the amber liquid, a sweet smell drifted up.

When Shiiba didn't immediately reach for it, Munechika said, dissatisfied, "Think there's something wrong with it?"

"You didn't spike it with something, did you?" Shiiba asked.

To prove his innocence, Munechika took a sip from his own cup. There was no reason to doubt the offering, but there was something in the way that Munechika looked that put Shiiba on his guard.

"I don't trust you," Shiiba said.

Munechika glowered at him. "Then don't drink it."

"I'll drink it," Shiiba protested. "No little powdered snacks though."

Finally, Shiiba took the cup. Munechika snorted. "You should have drunk it right away. The best coffee gets cold quick."

It was true. The coffee that Munechika had made was far more delicious

than anything he'd had in a café. The man must have used good beans.

"Why are you following me? Are you madly in love with me?"

Munechika's question was completely inappropriate. Shiiba glared at him.

"Idiot," he said. "Even if I were a woman, you'd be the last bastard I'd fall in love with. Save your stupid words for someone else," he said, totally shooting Munechika down.

Munechika looked coldly back at him. "You're pretty, but you have a foul mouth."

"Keep going," Shiiba retorted. "I'm not the pervert who gets turned on by watching other men jack off. You're probably impotent, aren't you? You probably can't even fire your magnum, it's just decoration."

As he said this, the better part of himself was screaming at him to stop. You shouldn't anger a potential S. You're useless!

However, Munechika, rather than getting mad, exploded in laughter. He slapped his thighs. Shiiba didn't think that anything he had just said was amusing.

"Why don't you find out for yourself whether my magnum is just a toy or the real thing?" Munechika asked, still laughing. "I'll have you instead of that woman."

"I'm going," Shiiba said tersely.

When he stood up from the sofa, Munechika grabbed his arms and asked him to wait. "It was a joke! Jeez. Such an angry man. Believe me, if I wanted to chase after man-ass, then I wouldn't have a shortage of partners. But, I might enjoy it more if it was you."

Shiiba couldn't tell if Munechika was joking or was being serious. He really disliked this man.

But he sat down again. "Munechika, you knew I was a detective, so why did you give me that information on Ma?"

"What brought this on?" Munechika asked, sobering up.

"You didn't really want to do anything with me, did you?" Shiiba asked back. "That strange deal was just an excuse to give me the information, right?"

"I don't know," Munechika said evasively.

"By telling me the information, then Ma was definitely going to be arrested. The Matsukura Group couldn't touch a member of the Taiwan mafia so that was your way of doing it. Am I right?" Shiiba said.

“You’re not entirely correct,” Munechika answered. “We did indeed want to take our revenge on Ma, but if that’s all we wanted, then we could have just made an anonymous call to the police. The reason for the deal was that I was interested in your body. The guy who was using Andou for information, I wondered what kind of man he was. The deal was enough. I had been thinking that you were just a pretty girly-boy, but you were much more amazing than I expected. I knew it from the way you jerked off.”

Shiiba began to feel angry. As soon as that ordeal was over, he had tried to erase it from his memory. To be praised for what he’d done made him feel more uncomfortable.

“Don’t get angry,” Munechika said. “That was all it was. I just wanted to have a chance to get to know the real you.”

Shiiba exploded. “How was that the real me? How can you tell who I am by watching that?!”

“Of course I could,” Munechika said. “In front of your lover, or someone that you want, you can pleasure yourself right? I didn’t arouse you. But when you started listening to what I was saying, that got you hard, didn’t it? You were surprised when your mood changed, and you even started to feel a little turned on. And then you managed to shoot off when you had a picture of two men in your mind. I didn’t actually think that you were going to manage it.”

“Aren’t you reading too much into it?” Shiiba threw back at Munechika. He was offended that the man thought he could assess a person’s personality through something as bizarre as that. “Maybe I just have a high sex drive and any dirty words will turn me on.”

“That might be the case,” Munechika mused. “You’re lucky if a few words can please you like that. Next time, shall I call your house? I’ll be your phone-sex buddy. I’ll turn you on with my voice every night. How about that?”

Idiot. This man really was the lowest of the low. Shiiba stood up from the chair. If he didn’t get out of here quick, then something weird might happen again.

“Going home already?” Munechika drawled.

“Yes,” Shiiba snapped. “I’ll only say this once. Thank you for helping us get Ma.”

Munechika didn’t say anything. He just looked at Shiiba silently. Shiiba couldn’t stand this awkward silence. He started to step away.

“Would it have been better if you knew the truth?” Munechika asked

quietly.

Shiiba stopped in his tracks. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. In Shiiba's heart, waves rippled.

"What do you mean?" he whispered.

Hiding his anxiety, Shiiba slowly turned around. Munechika sat on the arm of a chair, looking back at him. His eyes were quiet and Shiiba couldn't tell what was going on behind them. The situation only intensified his unease.

"You were relieved when you found out that Andou didn't die because of you," Munechika said flatly.

Shiiba felt like his heart had stopped beating. He couldn't get any words out at first.

Munechika continued. "I thought that you were Andou's woman. So I thought that you would be desperate to find out who had killed him. But Andou was nothing more than your informant. The fact that he is gone is nothing more than a simple inconvenience to you. Poor Andou. I think he would have cried if you had died."

"Shut up!" Shiiba screamed to silence the words he didn't want to hear. His relationship with Andou was something he didn't want to talk to other people about. "Don't say anything anymore..."

"Did I hit a sore spot?" Munechika asked mercilessly.

Of course, Shiiba had been relieved when he had found out that it wasn't his fault that Andou was murdered. That was undeniable. But Munechika had no right to talk about Andou like that.

"What the hell do you know?" Shiiba growled. "How do you know how I felt? You know nothing about us..." The feeling of remorse that he may have been the reason that Andou had been in danger had been like a knife in Shiiba's chest. One that Munechika just continued to twist. There was no way that Shiiba could keep his cool. "You shit, what does a shit like you know..."

Perhaps due to the intensity of his emotions, tears started to well up in Shiiba's eyes. He didn't want Munechika to see that. He wasn't proud of his weaknesses. He tried to escape, but Munechika held him back.

"Wait," Munechika said. "I haven't finished."

"You have nothing to say that I want to hear," Shiiba spat out. However much he tried, he couldn't pull away from Munechika's grip. The more he tried, the more it hurt. "Let go of me. I'll kick the shit out of you if you don't!" He turned back round and glared at Munechika. His black eyes glistened, betraying

the passion of his emotions.

Suddenly Munechika grabbed his hips and pulled Shiiba to his chest.

“Such beautiful eyes,” he whispered. “Finally, you’ve taken off your mask. That’s the face I’ve been longing to see. Not the pretty one, but the inner passionate one. That’s the face—”

He suddenly pushed Shiiba against the wall and kissed him violently. Taken aback by the sudden touch of Munechika’s lips, Shiiba was powerless to stop the man from pushing his tongue into his mouth.

“...Ngh...Mm...”

He started to lose sense of what was happening as Munechika’s thick tongue pushed so violently into his mouth that he could barely breathe.

“Sto...”

As soon as he opened his mouth to try and get a word out, Munechika changed angle and pushed his tongue in even deeper.

Munechika pushed his tongue in as far as it would go. As the tongue licked the roof of Shiiba’s mouth, a feeling he hadn’t known before shook his muscles. He’d never been touched there by another person. This was the first time in his life. To his surprise, he discovered that he was sensitive there.

The kiss continued. It tasted so much richer than anything he’d ever tasted before. His tongue being massaged by another man’s warm tongue, he couldn’t help but feel something. The tongue sought him out wherever he ran.

Finally parting lips, Munechika whispered sweetly in his ear, “Shall we sleep together?”

Shiiba tried to catch his racing breath and come to his senses. He couldn’t go at Munechika’s pace. He had to calm down.

“I thought you weren’t interested in men?” he asked.

“I’m not,” Munechika said. “You’re an exception.”

Munechika took Shiiba’s hand and started leading him into the bedroom. Shiiba hesitated. He shouldn’t have felt what he had when they shared that kiss. He wondered if the way to get Munechika as his S was through sex. He was prepared to sleep with him once. He didn’t want to risk saying no and have the man run away.

Work was work. He had to stick it out. Detectives had to get sexually intimate with women before to obtain information, so it didn’t really matter if this time it was a man.

This time it was a man. That was all there was to it.



The real problem was that to Munechika, he was nothing more than a rare and interesting toy. To work out whether Shiiba was going to be lucky or unlucky was difficult.

Munechika led him into another room and pushed him down onto the king-sized bed. The springs gave back a little and Shiiba sunk into the covers.

“You’re behaving yourself now. Am I that good a kisser?” Pushing himself down on top of Shiiba, Munechika stroked Shiiba’s hair.

“Yeah, it was good,” Shiiba answered. “It was so good, you broke down my defenses.”

Munechika frowned. “What’s up with you? You’re acting weird now.”

Shiiba put both his arms around Munechika’s neck and whispered, “I can’t help it. It was so good. That was the first time anyone has ever kissed me like that. It was amazing. I want you now. This is my first time with a guy, but I want it to be you...”

Thinking that winning him over with sex was going to make things easy, Shiiba pulled Munechika into him. How had Munechika made him feel things that Andou hadn’t been able to? Maybe because there wasn’t really anything between him and Munechika. He simply had to be very business-like about the sex.

When he tried to push his lips onto Munechika’s, he noticed that Munechika was laughing.

“What’s so funny?” he asked incredulously.

“Nothing,” Munechika said, between bouts of laughter. “You’re an odd one. Shiiba, you can’t make me yours with sex. I’ll tell you that now.”

“What are you saying?” Shiiba snapped.

Munechika grabbed his chin and pulled Shiiba towards him. Their gazes locked. “Did you think you could use me instead of Andou? I’m different from Andou. I’m not some hero who will give you information just because they want to be touched by you. You have to know that before we sleep together.”

Shiiba cursed internally. He’d made a mistake. Sex was not going to draw this man in. Shiiba pushed Munechika off him and sat up with force.

“What? We’re not going to do it now?” Munechika grumbled.

“I’m not going to get anything out of it so why would I want to?” Shiiba said.

Looking at Shiiba, Munechika rolled off the bed and laughed again. “You

were trying to bait me with sex?! You think that your body is worth that much?”

Shiiba's face flushed, revealing what a fool he had been.

“You are an impotent pervert after all!” he yelled. “You'll just have to jerk off all on your own forever!”

Shiiba's line made Munechika's shoulder heave with laughter.

Ignoring everything, Shiiba jumped off the bed. He was frustrated. He was mortified. But above all, he was angry with himself. Why did he lose his cool in front of this man?

While he was putting on his shoes, Munechika called out to him, “Hey.” He turned around just as something flew towards him. He caught it. “Have this.”

When he opened his hand, he found a key. It was a slightly different shape than usual though.

“It's the key to the room,” Munechika explained. “If you swipe along the card reader on the intercom then the door will open. Same with the elevator. Put in the key and then you don't have to press the button, it'll take you to this floor automatically. You can't go to any other floor.”

Inside the key was an embedded chip. There were a lot of locks and security checks in this building. Security was clearly of grave concern to Munechika.

Of course, the front hall was double locked. There were CCTV cameras and checks made by the front staff. The security was for their peace of mind.

Moreover, he had heard that the most expensive apartment in this block cost well over 4,000,000 yen a month. So the security wasn't surprising.

“What do you mean by giving me a key?” Shiiba asked.

Munechika smirked. “Don't keep following me. If you want something, come over. I don't have anything to hide from you.”

“Can I come in while you're doing it with a woman?” Shiiba asked sarcastically.

“No problem.” Munechika leered. “We can have a threesome.”

Without the strength to find a witty comeback, Shiiba put the key in his pocket. He should just give the key straight back, but he couldn't think straight at that moment. His rage was still smoldering inside him, but he was also feeling disappointed too.

He flung open the door and quickly left the room and Munechika behind. Walking rapidly down the corridor, he noticed a sweet smell lingering on his

body. It was the perfume that Munechika used. The scent followed him about, seemingly trying to remind Shiiba that even if he left, Munechika would still be with him.

Shiiba dreamt of his sister for the first time in a long while.

In his dream of Yukari, she was silently knitting. When Shiiba asked what she was knitting, Yukari held up the almost completed item to show him.

"It's a baby bonnet. It's cute, isn't it?"

Yukari looked so happy. She was knitting a hat for the child that would come in the cold winter. Her stomach hadn't yet grown much, but she already looked like a mother.

He knew it was just a dream, but Shiiba's heart was still filled with pain and longing upon seeing it. When Yukari died, she had been pregnant for five months. The little person's life had been snuffed out so young.

"Masaki, Hideyuki is worried. Are you going to be all right with the exam?"

"It's fine. I'll pass, no worries!"

In his dream, he answered with such confidence. He was going to join the Metropolitan Police. At the same time, hidden behind that decision, was the desire to be like his brother-in-law and make his sister feel proud of him.

When Shinozuka and Yukari had married, Shinozuka's family had not entirely approved. Even after they were married, they would keep saying hurtful things about her upbringing. Shinozuka was always on her side, but Shiiba couldn't help pitying his sister who would just quietly take the insults. So he wanted to be on the same career as Shinozuka, to ease the criticism of his sister even just a little.

When their parents had died, Yukari had looked after Shiiba. She was a sister that anyone would have been proud of. Shinozuka was always very busy, but he looked after Yukari well. When they all went out together as a family, those were some of the happiest times in Shiiba's life.

"Is that the time already? I have to get to my check-up."

"You can't." Shiiba was surprised. "You can't go!"

"Why? What's the matter? You are a strange boy."

Yukari laughed and stood up. Shiiba reached out to try and stop her, but Yukari disappeared. Shiiba was left grabbing at thin air.

On the way home from the maternity clinic the tragic incident had

happened. If she hadn't gone that day, then it would have never happened.

"Wait! Don't go!" he screamed at the space his sister had once occupied. Then he woke up.

Shiiba covered his face with his hands. His breath was irregular. His entire body was dripping with sweat. Looking at the clock, he saw that it was already past 11:00. He had gone to bed early so it was unusual that he had slept so long.

Just as he pulled himself out of bed, the phone rang. In the darkness, the phone display was lit up in orange. For a moment, he stared blankly at the display, but then he brought himself to his senses and reached out to pick it up.

It was Shinozuka. He wanted to know about the exam next year. Shiiba wanted to turn him down, but instead, his mouth gave a different answer.

"I'm sorry. I need more time to think."

"I see," Shinozuka said. "This is your life, so it's right that you think about it. Masaki, you go to Shinjuku a lot, don't you? I'm going to be in Shinjuku Street. I have something to do at the Tokyo Government Office."

"A meeting about the Terrorist Planning?" Shiiba asked.

"Yeah," Shinozuka answered. "This will be my last job for the Metropolitan."

The government, police and fire departments were going to cooperate at the beginning of the year in a chemical terror attack drill. Public Security had set up NBC terror investigators in response to the threat of a biological chemical attack by terrorists. They were going to be the control center for this drill.

"There's a meeting tomorrow so I'll be at the Government Office. If you have time, do you want to have dinner somewhere?" Shinozuka asked.

"I'm sorry. I already have plans tomorrow," Shiiba lied. He didn't actually have any plans, but he didn't want to see Shinozuka right then.

"I see," Shinozuka said. "Well maybe next time then. Careful that you don't catch a cold."

"Okay."

After he hung up the phone, Shiiba rolled back on the bed, exhausted.

He didn't have an ounce of enthusiasm to take his career down that path so why hadn't he just said so? Perhaps he actually was having doubts about continuing as a regular detective. He couldn't deny that he was starting to have second thoughts on continuing his current line of work.

He was thirsty. Getting up, he went to the fridge and grabbed a mineral water bottle. Listening to the low hum of the fridge's motor, he took a sip from the bottle. The water ran down his dry throat, slowly reaching his stomach. But even when he had drunk the whole bottle he was still thirsty.

It wasn't his body that was thirsty, but his heart. Shiiba had always felt a loneliness within him, like there was a sandy desert inside. A world buried in hot, burning sand where nothing was alive. The desert would stretch on forever. From inside, Shiiba was drying up.

He returned to the bed and closed his eyes. However much he tried, sleep would not come to him. Frustrated, he prayed for sleep to take him back, away from this world. Suddenly, he noticed the cell phone that was by his pillow. He reached out and opened up the flip phone.

He found a missed call. It was a number that wasn't in his phone book. After a while of him staring at the number, Shiiba pushed the call button.

"Yes."

It was a man who picked up. When Shiiba said nothing, the man asked, "This is Shiiba, right?"

Shiiba still didn't say anything. He only pushed the phone against his ear.

"Don't stay quiet, say something," the man demanded.

"What are you wearing?" Shiiba finally asked.

Hearing the "worst phone sex line ever" uttered in a monotone voice, Munechika, on the other end of the line, laughed.

"Bad joke," the man said. "Try saying something better."

"I didn't say it to make you laugh," Shiiba said.

"I'm always so bored," Munechika said. "You're a good source of amusement."

Shiiba wished that Munechika would stop trying to pander to him. But he was satisfied that it was Munechika. The man was always awake. But no matter what expression he was making, happy or annoyed, his eyes always looked dark, as if there was some deep regret hidden there.

"Let's get on with it then?" Munechika said.

"What?" Shiiba asked, puzzled.

"Phone sex," Munechika replied as he always did, and Shiiba couldn't help a small pained smile from forming on his face.

"I'm not going to do that," he answered.

"So why did you call me then?" Munechika asked.

Shiiba didn't know the answer. He hadn't been thinking about work, this wasn't the sort of business call he would make.

"Oh, I know," Munechika continued. "You wanted to hear my voice. If you're sad sleeping on your own, come over to my place. We can continue where we left off. I'll treat you well."

"Lay off." Shiiba growled. "I told you, if there is nothing in it for me, then I'm not sleeping with you."

"There is something in it for you. It'll feel good," Munechika crooned. "Anyway, whenever you do feel like it just slip into my bed."

"Even in a hundred years, that is never going to happen. Goodbye."

It was an annoying conversation, but it had cheered him up a little.

"Hey, wait!"

Ignoring what the man was going to say, Shiiba grinned and hung up.

Chapter 6

Ying Fa Lin had returned from China and was back in Japan.

Shiiba quickly contacted Lin and made arrangements for a meeting. The place that Lin had asked to meet was a restaurant at the top of a hotel in Shinjuku.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, Shiiba headed for the ninth floor. He was shown to a room overlooking the imperial gardens.

Lin appeared five minutes after the time they had agreed upon. As Andou had told him, the man looked like an ordinary businessman. He was around 40, of average build and looked mild mannered.

"It's good to meet you," Shiiba greeted. "My name is Shibano. Thank you for coming."

"I'm Lin," the man replied. "Happy to see you too. I'm sorry to hear about Mr. Andou. I was surprised when I heard the news."

He had a slight accent, but apart from that, his Japanese was very fluent. Andou had told Shiiba that Lin had been in Japan for 10 years now.

"I'm very sorry too," Shiiba said. "He was a good friend."

"But I'm glad to hear that they caught the murderer," Lin added.

Surrounded by plates of food, they talked a little of Andou. Lin had been hoping that Andou would be a good trading partner. He had regretted Andou's sudden death.

"I heard that it was the Taiwanese mafia who had Mr. Andou killed," he said. "Chinese crimes have been increasing recently which makes me very sad. But the Japanese police are to blame too. In my homeland, even robbery and sexual assault means the death penalty. Compared to that, the Japanese are easy on crime. Chinese criminals think that there is no place like Japan where it is so easy to make money. To them, the streets are covered in money."

"The streets?" Shiiba asked.

"Yes, vending machines, ATM's, you have so very many," Lin clarified. "For a criminal from China, Japan is heaven. Prison is more like a hotel. So, even when they get deported they just come back to do it again. The most important thing to them is making money. In China, we don't have this crime of passion. You can live without love, but you can't live without money."

"You are in Japan on business too? How is work going?" Shiiba asked,

changing the subject.

“Thank you, it’s all right,” Lin replied. “But my company is government-run. All the capital comes from the Chinese government. That’s as much as I can say. So, even though I am the president, my salary is not that much.”

Shiiba felt a little bothered by what Lin said. Why would a state-run company pretend to be a private one?

“So you are a government employee then?” he probed.

“Something like that. Anyway, I hear that you are a fan of guns Mr. Shibano?” Lin asked.

Shiiba concentrated. He had to be careful.

“Yes, that’s right,” he answered. “Of course, only the real thing. When I’ve been abroad I’ve often tried them out.”

“Is that so? Did you talk with Mr. Andou about it?” Lin asked.

Shiiba nodded. “Yes. I was very interested so I wanted to meet with you myself.”

Lin nodded. He looked satisfied. He picked up an attaché case that was at his side. Moving the dinner plates aside, he put it on the table and released the catch. He turned the open attaché case to face Shiiba.

“This is what I have to show you right now,” he said. “If there is anything else that you would like, I can obtain that too.”

Shiiba took a slight intake of breath. Inside were three pistols. He hadn’t expected Lin to bring goods with him. Shiiba was getting a glimpse of what Lin was really about, underneath the appearance.

There were three different kinds, but on the grips, there were small stars embedded so he knew all of them were made in China. One was a Tokarev, the other a Mokarev. But he didn’t know what the other was. It was smaller than the other two.

“This one, what is it?” he asked.

“This is a 77,” Lin explained. “I’m sure you know. In normal automatic weapons, you need to manually pull the slide back to load the chamber. But on a 77, when you pull the trigger guard, the slide automatically pulls back so it can be entirely operated by one hand. That is its feature. It was developed for the Chinese army, police, and high ranking officials as a small hand weapon.”

It was a gun that was not well known overseas then. Shiiba was becoming more and more baffled by Lin. The man worked as the president of a state-funded company. On the side, he sold guns in the black-market. What

organization could be working behind him?

“How did you get these into Japan?” he asked.

“I can’t tell you all the details, but I have a friend in the consular office. If you carry a diplomatic passport then no one inspects you,” Lin answered.

Shiiba didn’t believe that diplomats could smuggle guns, but if he asked too many questions then Lin would be on his guard. He decided to change the subject.

“How much?” he asked.

“You were a friend of Mr. Andou so I will lower the price. How is this for you?”

Lin held up one finger. Even for a genuine gun, 1,000,000 yen was a little expensive. Lin saw him hesitate.

“These are expensive items.” He smiled. “This 54 Tokarev is splendid. Unlike Russian-made ones, the barrel is chrome so it’s very tolerant. It can fire up to 100,000 shots perfectly. If you need parts or ammunition then you must contact me, I can get it straight from China for you.”

Normally speaking, there was no after service with black-market guns. Lin on the other hand seemed to provide his clients with any extras that they needed. He must have some very special connections for this to be possible. Shiiba was starting to believe that a diplomat might really be involved in this venture.

“Thank you,” he said, stalling. “Please let me think about it. We should go drinking together soon.”

“Then I will book us a room so we can talk some more,” Lin said. “Oh yes, I completely forgot, I meant to give this to you.”

From a paper bag next to him, Lin took out a small box. Inside was a small decorative incense burner.

“I was going to give this to Mr. Andou,” he explained. “I bought it in China. I hope that you will accept it instead.”

“But this is expensive,” Shiiba protested. “I can’t accept it.”

He couldn’t carelessly accept gifts from people that he was investigating. He politely declined, but Lin smiled and handed it out.

“You were Mr. Andou’s friend, so you must accept it. Please,” he insisted.

“In that case, thank you.”

Not wanting to cause Lin to lose face, Shiiba looking grateful, reached out and accepted the box. The burner was green with a translucent white

quality to it and it was set into a wooden stand.

“Is this jade?” he asked.

“Yes,” Lin answered. “It is a special white jade. In old China, it was said to ward off evil and that if you kept it near you, you could live a long life. The burner is made from one piece of stone. It is a very unique and beautiful art-form. I hope that you use it to decorate your home.”

Finishing their dinner, they left the restaurant together.”

“Where were you born, Mr. Lin?” Shiiba asked.

“I was born in Fujian,” Lin replied.

“I see,” Shiiba said. “Many of the Chinese here are the children of those who immigrated from China.”

“Yes,” Lin said. “Fujian used to be the center for sea trade, so it’s an area from where a lot of people immigrated from. Nowadays, the Fujian mafia is quite famous. It is quite distressing.”

Of course, Fujian was indeed famous as the departure point of many illegal immigrants to Japan and as the origin of many Peking gangs. The illegal immigrants would pay an organization called a snakehead to smuggle them out of the country. These snakehead organizations would use a wide network of people to smuggle and obtain false travel papers and illegal work for their customers in their destination countries.

“Can anyone get guns there?” Shiiba wanted to know.

“No, no,” Lin replied. “The only people who have the right to carry guns are the army, the police and certain officials. Gun laws are even stricter there than they are in Japan. Mao Ze Dong said that “power comes from the mouth of a gun.” To protect the power of the government, the people cannot have guns.”

So even in China, guns had a lot of restrictions on them, so their manufacture and movement would be difficult for even the mafia groups. Could the organization supporting Lin have some kind of political power too?

Saying his goodbyes in the lobby, Shiiba heard a voice calling out behind him. Turning around, his heart stopped.

“Mr. Munechika!” Lin called out. “What a coincidence.”

“If it isn’t Mr. Lin,” Munechika said. “It’s been a while.”

The smiling face coming towards them was Keigo Munechika’s. Maybe because he had swept his hair back today, but he seemed even more brazen than usual. The striped suit he was wearing suited him well. He looked like a businessman.

Seeing Munechika, Shiiba clenched his fists. The timing was the worst. If Lin found out he was a detective then everything was over.

“I’m sorry I haven’t phoned you,” Lin said. “We should have dinner sometime.”

“Yes, we should,” Munechika agreed. “I have a car waiting for me, so I need to be off.”

Munechika didn’t even look at Shiiba and walked to the elevators. Looking at the retreating figure, Shiiba secretly heaved a huge sigh of relief. He then took the chance to make some more inquiries.

“Was that a business acquaintance?” he asked Lin.

“Yes,” Lin answered. “He is the president of the EMZ Corporation. He’s still young, but he’s very capable. He has a lively personality too.”

Munechika worked with Lin legitimately it seemed. But Shiiba wondered if their relationship extended to other, less legal, ventures too.

“Well, Mr. Shibano. It was good to meet you.” Lin offered his right hand. Shiiba grabbed it and Lin, with some force, pulled him close. “I will be hoping for a positive answer,” he said, smiling.

Shiiba needed to find out the identity of the organization working behind Lin. His mind was racing as he walked towards Shinjuku station. Suddenly, his phone rang. It was an unrecognized number yet again, but he could guess who it was.

“Hello,” he said.

“Are you alone?” It was the man he had just passed.

“Yes. What do you want?” he asked.

“You owe me,” the man said.

Shiiba knew what the man was going to say, but he decided to play along. “Why?”

“If I’d have run up and said ‘Hi, Detective Shiiba, investigations going well today then?’ then that would have caused you a few problems, I’m guessing.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Shiiba growled.

“I told you not to use such foul words,” the man scolded. “They don’t suit your pretty face. Come over when you’re free. You can repay me.”

Munechika sounded like he was enjoying himself.

“Go fuck yourself,” Shiiba said as he hung up.

Munechika’s patronizing attitude really rubbed him the wrong way. However, he couldn’t deny that Munechika had saved him. He had to thank the man.

Shiiba got into the train and headed for Shibuya. He had to go to the office and tell Takasaki of what had happened with his meeting with Lin.

Getting there before Takasaki, Shiiba waited. Takasaki’s face was full of expectation, but after telling him all that he had gathered, Shiiba’s boss looked subdued.

“Who is this Lin? Using a diplomat to smuggle, it’s suspicious. Also, a state-funded dummy company? I just don’t get it.”

“Sir, shall I accept one of the guns at the next meeting?” Shiiba asked.

As expected, Takasaki looked even more troubled.

“I don’t think we’re ready for that. We need to look more into Lin’s personal affairs. Then we can continue the investigation in that direction. Keep meeting with him for now. Gather information. Do not rush this.”

Shiiba swallowed his desire to scream an objection at his superior. If they were too slow, Lin might slip from their grasp. He carefully rephrased what he wanted to say.

“If I stall, then Lin will be suspicious. If we don’t actually come to a deal then—”

“No,” Takasaki said. “If there is indeed a diplomat or a government agency supporting him, then it could be a real problem. It could develop into an international case. First prepare a report, and whatever you do, don’t do anything stupid.”

Shiiba could only nod at this new aggressive tone that Takasaki was taking. It was true that there were still too many questions surrounding Lin. It wasn’t going to be easy. But he had the guns right there, and he was trying to sell them. That was proof enough for Shiiba and he wanted to push this case ahead.

Besides, this had been the last piece of information that Andou had given him. Whatever happened, he didn’t want it to go to waste. He didn’t want only Lin, he wanted the whole organization and system behind the man too.

Takasaki changed the subject to put an end to talking about Lin.

“Anyway, how is the Munechika thing going? Any progress?”

“We’ve met but I don’t think it’s possible,” Shiiba said. “I don’t think I

can do it.”

“What are you talking about? You’ve only just started. I know you can. Take your time. Gain his trust little by little. We can’t let him get away.”

The pep talk sounded hollow to Shiiba right now. Keigo Munechika was not an easy target. Shiiba wasn’t getting results whichever approach he tried. When he had tried sex it had just been a trap. He felt that it didn’t matter how long he took or how many times they met, it just wasn’t going to happen.

He wasn’t getting anything right. Lin or Munechika. Shiiba sighed a deep sigh. Depression was filling his heart.

Shiiba got off the train at Urawamisono Station at the end of the Saitama Expressway.

There was no one around. Shiiba looked up at the gloomy winter sky that was now covered in dark clouds. The weather report had said it wasn’t going to start raining until the evening so he hadn’t brought an umbrella. Praying that it didn’t start raining now, Shiiba started walking away from the station.

After walking for 10 minutes, he could see his destination ahead of him. It was a spacious but ill-maintained cemetery. He bought a candle and some incense from the guard box that was near the entrance and then proceeded into the cemetery. Standing in front of a grave, he laid the flowers that he had been carrying. Then, he lit the candle and incense.

Today was the anniversary of Kaori’s death. Every year, he had come with Andou to visit her, but now Andou was resting with her here too.

Nishi had told him that the cremation had taken place three days ago. If they had tried, they could have probably found some of Andou’s relatives to take care of the funeral arrangements, but Nishi had seemed to want to take care of it himself.

Nishi had known that only Kaori was buried here. The siblings’ parents must be buried somewhere. However, Andou hadn’t wanted Kaori buried with their parents when she died. There was probably a complicated family affair behind it.

Shiiba hadn’t attended the service for Andou. That was because there were probably going to be a lot of people involved, with the police staking out the funeral home. There were plenty of people who might have recognized him but didn’t know that he was now working undercover. However much he had wanted to be there, he couldn’t.

He had tried not to let sadness overcome him and had kept on with his work. However, coming here, the reality of Andou's death finally hit him.

He looked at the black granite headstone and thought about Andou. Andou was such a quiet man. It wasn't that he wasn't good at speaking, but if he didn't have anything worthwhile to say then he would stay quiet. It was his expressive eyes that would speak of the emotions hidden behind his closed lips.

It was always more difficult for the ones left behind. There was so much doubt in Shiiba's mind. No matter what, death has to come to everyone. But to be taken so early breaks the hearts of those who see it happen.

Shiiba felt a cold drop of water on his cheek. To protect himself from the coming rain, he pulled up the collar of his leather coat and turned around.

Suddenly lifting his head, he saw a shadow coming from the opposite direction in front of him. In an instant, he knew who it was. Shiiba went to one of the side paths and hid himself behind a gravestone.

It was Munechika. He was holding a large bunch of roses and a bottle of alcohol. Shiiba peeked from behind the gravestone. Munechika stopped in front of Andou's grave and gently placed the flowers down.

"Drink up friend, it's your favorite, Russel's Reserve," Munechika said, opening the bottle and pouring it onto the grave. "Is it good? The flowers are for Kaori. Roses don't suit you. Hey Kaori, your brother is a real idiot. I shouldn't be mourning him now."

Hearing the sorrowful tone in his voice, Shiiba was moved. Munechika hadn't known only Andou but Kaori too.

"A real idiot..."

Munechika stroked the rain-soaked headstone. It was such a gentle touch, as if the grave contained a beloved. Shiiba was so full of conflicting emotions he couldn't express. He couldn't watch anymore. He turned and fled from the scene.

It was the middle of December and even the streets were strangely restless.

Christmas decorations were everywhere, and the usually gaudy Shinjuku was even brighter now. Shiiba quietly walked the streets. He had met with his informants to be updated on the latest goings on. Today had brought some very interesting information.

A man who operated a snack shop in Golden Street had given him some valuable information about witnessing a gangster who occasionally came to his shop carrying a gun. The gangster had taken the gun out of his pocket and boasted that it had cost him 10,000 yen.

To have been able to buy it at such a low price meant that it was very likely to be a CRS pistol. The CRS was a bootleg pistol made in home factories based in places like Cebu in the Philippines. It was often inferior and there had been many accidents reported involving them.

When Shiiba had been receiving special instructions on handguns from a forensic specialist who dealt particularly in handguns, he had gotten a chance to handle a sample pistol and inspect its construction. The parts were so badly made. Shiiba had seen that it was a volatile weapon. If you mishandled it, you were very likely to blow your own hand off.

He had given the storeowner a little money and thanked him. He could trust this information and he had already worked out the gangster's name and the group he worked for.

The Incidents Team had a different problem than that of the Intelligence Team. No matter how good the information was, it was exceedingly difficult to recover the gun itself. They would do a house raid based on their information, but very often they came out empty-handed. Guns were different from drugs in that they weren't something you kept on you.

Of course if you were a bodyguard protecting a gang leader in the middle of intense rivalry then you would often carry one, but normally, it was far too much of a risk to carry a gun. Occasionally, a gangster's mistress would turn them in, but that seemed to be on the decrease too.

The criminals must be hiding them somewhere, but no matter how well hidden they were, why couldn't the police find them? Shiiba couldn't be satisfied with the theory that the criminals had just become more skillful at hiding them.

Even if the police did arrest the gangsters whom they knew for sure were in possession of guns, to save their own necks, the criminals wouldn't confess where the guns were. They would say that they didn't know the person that they got it from or that the person who sold it was already dead. They would refuse to say anything anymore. Plus, the brokers had put in some strong safety checks so that the guns would keep selling.

There were three things necessary in the cycle: connections at the place where the guns were made, smugglers to bring the guns into Japan, and, finally, people to sell them to. If things continued as they were, then there was

no way that the police would get a clear idea of the big picture. Not knowing a thing, the police couldn't stop the tide of gun smuggling.

Shiiba's superiors didn't know the difficulties of working on the field. They just kept screaming 'find the guns!' All they knew were statistics. Everyone thought that the guns must indeed be somewhere. But the operatives couldn't find them. It was like chasing ghosts. And now, all the detectives who were working hard on finding the guns were exhausted.

Making his way through the crowd, Shiiba felt tired. He didn't know whether he was tired of detective work or of life itself.

He was only 28, and it was too early to be that tired. He laughed at himself. He had a little more left in him yet.

After the people at the top had put an end to the Lin case, he had not received any more answers. Maybe that was why he was feeling down. He had wanted to meet with Lin again and delve deeper, but he still hadn't been given permission. If you couldn't let the hound out of the doghouse then he couldn't do his work. It was frustrating to have left it hanging like this.

Making his way towards the entrance of Shinjuku Station's west exit, he passed a lively group of students. They looked like they were having fun. Looking to the side, he noticed a happy couple with their arms linked together. You could see on their faces that they were happy just to be with each other.

Even if they were strangers, it was nice to see people enjoying life so much. He didn't feel jealous that he was alone. Instead, rather than being surrounded by sorrowful faces, it was much better to see joyful faces to lift your spirits.

His job was so private and he was always alone, thinking this was a little painful. Looking around, he thought that everyone looked like they were enjoying themselves.

There were so many people here. So why was he the only one on his own? These feelings he wished he didn't have floated to the surface.

Loneliness like a cold night crept into his heart. Once his heart had been chilled, he couldn't warm it up again.

Shiiba grimaced. He wasn't a child anymore. If he was lonely then he should find himself a lover. But, by not trying, he had from the beginning decided to be alone. Wishing for something he couldn't have, he couldn't help but envy others.

Turning his eyes back to the front, he saw a girl of five or six jump out from the entrance of a department store. She was holding in her arms a stuffed

teddy bear. She wasn't looking ahead of her and, inevitably, she went running into a man who was passing by.

"Oh dear! Sweetie?" a voice exclaimed.

A woman who must have been her mother came running out after her. The little girl sat flat on her bottom, then looked around at her mother, her face already screwed up, ready to cry.

"I'm so sorry. Are you alright?" the woman asked, bowing to the man her daughter had bumped into. The man said it was fine, and then picked up the little girl. Shiiba, upon seeing the man's face, was surprised.

"No injuries? Does it hurt anywhere?" the man asked.

Patting away the dirt on the girl's clothes was Shinozuka.

"My teddy..." the girl mumbled while holding back the tears.

Looking down at his feet, Shinozuka smiled. "Oh, this? I'm sorry. I hurt Teddy. Here you go."

He handed over the teddy bear and the little girl hugged it close to her.

"My mom got me this," she explained. "It was my Christmas present. Mr. Santa gave me a cuddly rabbit."

"Really? That sounds like fun."

The little girl's mother smiled and put her arm around her daughter's shoulders.

"I'm very sorry," she said.

"No, don't worry about it," Shinozuka said.

The girl waved goodbye and walked with her mother towards the ticket gates. Shinozuka stayed standing there, watching the two of them walk away.

Seeing Shinozuka like that, Shiiba was also frozen. If Yukari had had his child she would have been about the same age as that girl. The thought was unbearable.

Shinozuka was looking at the life that he had lost. What was he thinking? What was he looking for in that pair?

Suddenly, tears welled up in Shiiba's eyes. He quickly wiped them away with his finger.

It was not only him that was hurting. Of course, other people were hurt too. But it was only then that he really felt it. Shiiba had always condemned Shinozuka for rejecting detective work. He really could be cruel.



But that wasn't it. All the things that weren't said must have been even more painful for Shinozuka. Shiiba had no way of knowing how much Shinozuka's heart must hurt.

In the silence, Shinozuka must have been so angry. Angry at the senseless crime. Angry at the impotent system that employed him. And, above all, angry at himself. He must have been silently killing himself over all of it.

Amid the crowd of people pushing past them, the two stood there as if time stood still. Shiiba stood there helplessly staring at the broad shoulders wrapped in the trench coat that stood in front of him. He wanted so badly to run up and hug his brother-in-law. To be back to the way they used to be. They had lost the same thing.

But he couldn't do that.

Time started again.

However much he hoped, Shiiba couldn't be that person again. He was a man alone, a detective alone, he and Shinozuka walked different paths now.

As if waking from a dream, Shinozuka finally took a step forward. His defeated expression left him and he was the old Shinozuka again.

Shiiba watched Shinozuka disappear into the crowd. Then he ventured forward as well.

Chapter 7

Stepping into the entrance hall, Shiiba could hear the sound of running water. He followed it to a dressing room. In the back of the room was a round glass shower cubicle. Obscured behind the glass was the naked body of a man. He leaned against the large dressing counter that ran along the wall, which was furnished with two sinks. He watched the shadow of the man showering.

After a few moments, the man opened the glass door. Upon seeing Shiiba standing there with his arms crossed, Munechika's eyes opened wide, but that was his only visible reaction.

"That grave expression suits you," he teased. "Slipping into the house while her husband is away to seduce the wife."

Shiiba was wearing a simple business suit. Munechika wore a slight grin.

"I didn't know you liked soap operas," Shiiba said.

"I have lots of interests," Munechika replied. "Pass me that towel."

Grabbing the bath towel, Shiiba threw it to him. Munechika quickly dried his body and then put on a black bathrobe.

"So Munechika, where are the guns?"

At the sudden question, Munechika frowned.

"What are you talking about?" he asked. "I'm not hiding any."

"No. Not you. I'm talking about the gangsters. The police have been looking all over, but can't find any at all. So many gun crimes, but not one gun to be found. It's getting the detectives antsy."

Munechika snorted. "When you use a gun, you throw it away afterwards. Common knowledge. There are so many guns in this country; you can always get a new one. No one would be foolish enough to shoot it and then keep it on them as evidence. Just being discovered in possession of a gun can be one to 10 years inside. If you have live ammo in it, that can add an extra three years. No one would be that stupid."

"But where would they throw them?" Shiiba persisted.

"If they'd been thrown in the sea, they'd rust up quickly and lose their fingerprints," Munechika said.

"Is that right?" Shiiba asked.

"That's right," Munechika said firmly.

Shiiba wasn't satisfied. He felt that Munechika was trying to avoid the

subject. There was the possibility that the man was telling the truth. Munechika might import a lot of guns, but as soon as they came on the market, he may never see them again.

“You work in arms investigation? You’re COC?” Munechika suddenly asked.

Shiiba couldn’t hide the truth forever from someone who was a potential S so he admitted, “Yes, I’m from COC5 with the Metropolitan Police. My work is obtaining information on arms smuggling. Have you heard of S work?”

“That’s where you get someone on the inside of the organization that’s under surveillance to pass information, correct?” Munechika said.

Shiiba nodded. “Correct. It’s an investigative method. We call these informants our spies, our S.”

“So, Andou was your S?” Munechika asked.

“I want you to be my S now. Munechika, be mine.”

Munechika didn’t answer his direct invitation, only the corners of his lips raised slightly.

“You want me to be a police dog?” he asked.

Shiiba nodded once more. “Yes. I will be your owner. If you want treats, I’ll give them. If you’re mine, you can sleep with me as much as you want.”

Munechika squinted at him. “You really think that’s what I’m worth? Small treats?”

“I’m not the one who decides what you’re worth,” Shiiba countered. “That would be you.”

He slowly approached Munechika. Then he leisurely stroked the outline of Munechika’s body from top to bottom. Finally, he knelt on the floor. Opening the bathrobe, Shiiba without hesitation, closed his lips around Munechika’s member.

Burying his face in the still damp pubic hair, Shiiba licked the penis with the tip of his tongue. With each lick, Munechika was steadily getting harder. Finally, it was tense and fully hard. He took the hard shaft into his mouth and started to caress it with his tongue and lips. It didn’t feel as bad as he thought it would. Instead, licking this man’s shaft was, in a strange way, turning him on. The thin skin covering it was smooth and Shiiba was absorbed in how good it tasted.

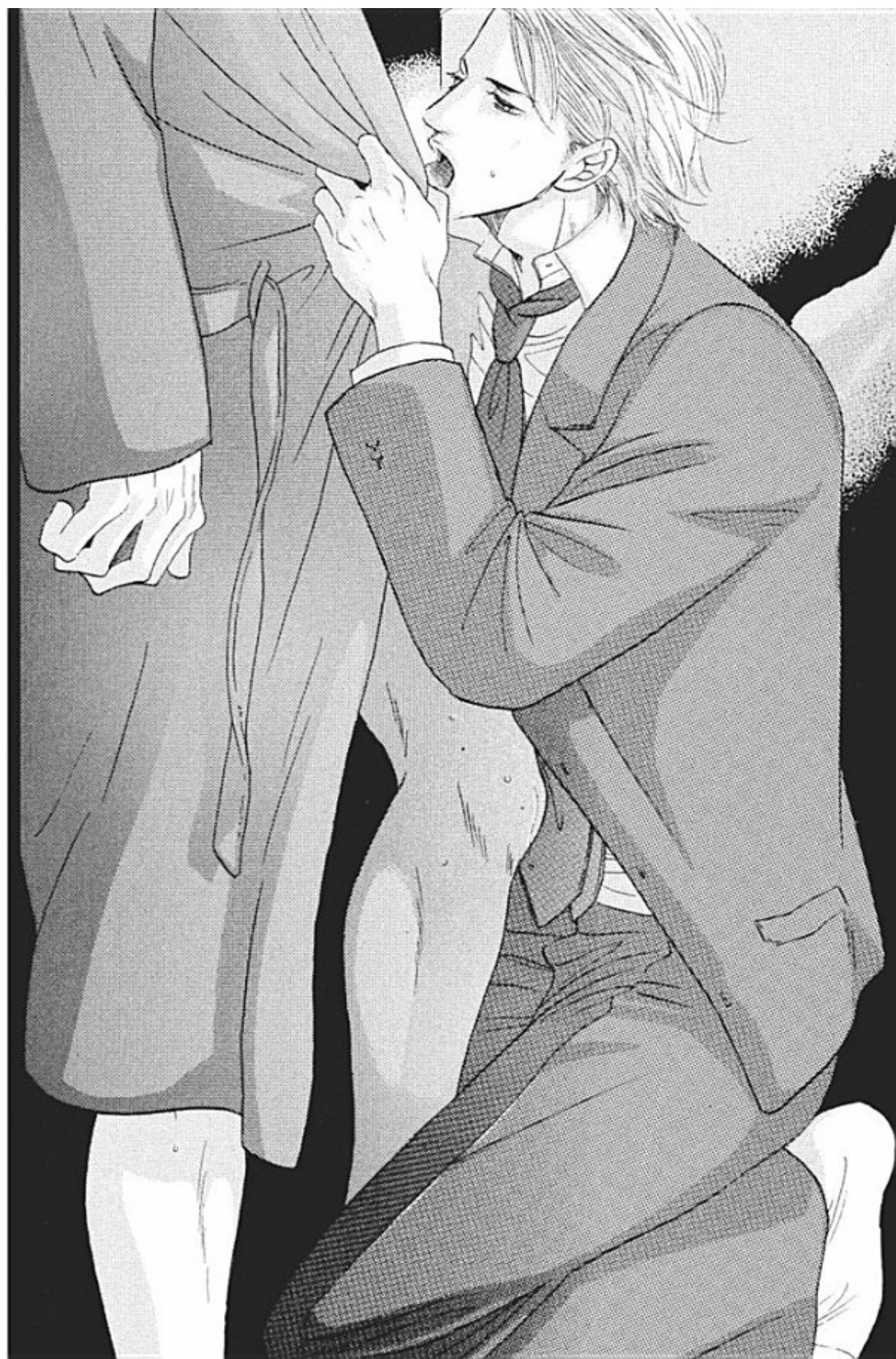
Even though what Shiiba was doing wasn’t in the handbook, he had decided that sexually pursuing Munechika was the right thing to do. The

quickest way to getting the job done would be to use his body. That was why Shiiba had come here.

Munechika didn't say anything. He just let Shiiba do what he wanted. Shiiba, thinking that Munechika was probably looking down on him as a fool, looked up. Their eyes met.

Munechika's eyes were a color he'd not seen before. It was different from disdain or mockery, yet it wasn't lust. They almost looked like they were filled with love.

Feeling that he was going to get sucked in by those eyes, Shiiba's breathing suddenly became difficult. He didn't know why. It was as if the sweet emotion had constricted his heart and might even stop it entirely.



To escape the intense gaze, Shiiba closed his eyes and started to suck again on Munechika's member. Munechika placed his hand on the back of Shiiba's head. Shiiba thought that the man was going to make him stop, but Shiiba wouldn't let him and kept on pleasuring Munechika right to the inevitable end.

Munechika made a low groan and shot into Shiiba's mouth. The warm fluid hit the back of his throat and he swallowed it. However, as if his body was rejecting the unfamiliar flavor, it didn't go down well and he choked.

Munechika quickly pulled away from him.

"Here, water," he said, offering Shiiba a glass filled with water.

Taking it, Shiiba rinsed out his mouth.

"I don't know—" he began.

"You did a good job," Munechika interrupted. "Paying me back for that time?"

Shiiba shook his head. "No. I wanted to show you what your reward could be."

As soon as Shiiba stood up, long arms wrapped around his hips and Munechika pulled him close. Lifting his head he was caught in Munechika's eyes. They were so close, their noses almost touched.

"All right," Munechika whispered. "But you can't buy me with just your body. I'm not that cheap. If you really want me, then you have to win my heart."

"Heart...?" Shiiba frowned.

"You're a carnal man," Munechika said, seemingly unhappy.

He pushed Shiiba away and left the dressing room.

Shiiba chased after him. "Hey, what did that mean?"

Munechika entered the living room and sat down on the sofa with a thud. The ceiling lights weren't on, but the room was softly lit with lamps.

"It doesn't matter," Munechika answered. "Anyway, if that was a taste of the rewards, you can start paying me back now."

"You are greedy," Shiiba growled. "How do you want me to pay you back?"

"Sit here," Munechika said, pointing to his knees.

Shiiba was amazed. "I'm not a hostess," he said indignantly. "Why do I have to sit on your lap? Give me a break. And anyway, what's fun about a guy sitting on your knee?"

“I’ll enjoy it,” Munechika said. “I’ll be able to see your stubborn face. Come here, Shiiba.”

Shiiba obeyed. He’d already given the man a blowjob. What did the man mean by this?

“I’m not a chair,” Munechika said. “Sit sideways.”

Shiiba moved his body round. He leaned his back against the right arm of the sofa.

“Is this what you want?” he muttered.

Munechika nodded.

“Now what do we do? Shall I sing a song?” Shiiba asked sarcastically.

“Sit there and look at me,” Munechika replied.

Shiiba felt uncomfortable. He didn’t want to sit on a man’s lap. But he did what he was told and looked at the man in front of him.

Looking at Munechika like this, Shiiba realized the beauty in him. He called it “beauty,” but it wasn’t that the make-up of Munechika’s face was good. But under the gloss of his appearance, his body was mature. Shiiba grudgingly conceded to himself that Munechika was a superb example of a man.

“There’s something I want to ask,” he said.

“What is it?”

“What connection do you have to Ying Fa Lin?”

Munechika frowned and tried to change the subject. “Couldn’t we talk about something a little sexier since you’re sitting on my knee?”

“I can’t, I’m a detective,” Shiiba said brusquely.

Munechika gave a grim smile.

“I trade with Lin’s company,” he answered. “That’s it. Nothing for you to be suspicious of.”

Shiiba smiled. “So you know about Lin’s other work. Who is he?”

“Hey I’m not your S yet. Don’t use me as your informant.”

“Please, Munechika, tell me what you know. Andou told me about Lin. I don’t want to waste the last piece of information he gave me,” Shiiba pleaded, his face serious.

He intended to lay his pride as a detective on the line for this. He needed so much more information.

“First sex, next you’ll be giving me a sob story. What a jerk,” Munechika complained. But he kept talking about Lin despite his complaints.

“Lin is really a soldier in his own country. His company exports Japanese mechanical goods overseas, but this company doesn’t really achieve anything. His real business is Chinese oil, arms and ammunition. He uses Japan as a base to export them. He just manages the paperwork in Japan. The goods are then carried from China directly to their destination country. It’s a Chinese tunnel company. All the profits are probably moved back to the country or their military.”

In other words, Lin was an arms dealer working under the direction of the Chinese government. This was too much. Shiiba was confused.

“Is that true?” he asked. “But why is he working from Japan? Surely he should set up in the country that he’s exporting to?”

“I don’t understand it that well either,” Munechika admitted. “Perhaps because Japan doesn’t have the same laws concerning spies that other countries do, so it’s easier for someone employed by the military to operate here.”

Shiiba, deep in thought, got off Munechika’s knees and sat next to him. Munechika looked at him, dissatisfied, but Shiiba decided to ignore that. He couldn’t sit in such an awkward position for too long.

“How do you know so much? Did you buy guns from Lin?” Munechika played dumb and pulled on Shiiba’s earlobe. “Ouch. Let go.”

“I told you I wasn’t interested in guns,” Munechika said. “My Yakuza friend bought them from Lin before. I’ve been guessing things from what he’s told me. When one of them went to China with Lin, he was shown around the gun factory. The place was heaped with guns, apparently. Well, I suppose that would only be natural in a place like China which exports them to the world.”

It was as Munechika said. There was any number of companies that exported weapons in China, all of them state-funded. In that way, foreign currency could be acquired from the gun sales, which then flowed into the state’s pockets.

Any weapons company would fulfill an order, regardless if it was a government or a civilian company. Nevertheless, they shouldn’t be dealing guns in a country like Japan, which had strict restrictions on bearing arms. If their dealings were discovered, then there would be an international incident. Not just that, Lin’s company was illegal, but had the backing of the government and military. When he posed these questions to Munechika, the man just shrugged his shoulders.

“It doesn’t matter to me why Lin wants to sell guns in Japan.”

“It matters to me!” Shiiba cried out. “I have to catch Lin. Not just Lin but everyone supporting him.”

Munechika suddenly looked serious. He grabbed Shiiba’s chin. “Leave it,” he said fiercely. “He’s too big. How is one detective going to fight him? You know that the people above him are government or military organizations, so you have to leave it. You know that Japan can’t do anything against China.”

That made Shiiba remember the sinking of a mysterious boat that caused a stir in the world. The Japanese coast guard had spotted an unidentified boat in the East China Sea near Kyushu. After several warnings, they had proceeded to fire shots at the boat and it had sunk. When it was recovered, it was identified as a North Korean spy boat. The East China Sea was a well-known sea route for Chinese and North Korean smugglers. The waters in which the boat had sunk had, in fact, been Chinese, causing problems for its recovery. China strongly objected to Japan’s actions. Finally, after nine months, the boat was recovered, but the Japanese government had to pay the Chinese 150,000,000 yen. Before this incident, American satellite pictures had made it look probable that the North Koreans had bribed the Chinese naval ships in the area to let them pass and even allowed them to buy fuel. Still, the Japanese hadn’t been able to push their point.

“The Japanese government is never going to take the risk of offending the Chinese government,” Munechika added. “You’ve picked the wrong target. Don’t waste your time.”

“No, I have no intention of—”

The phone rang, cutting off Shiiba’s rebuttal.

“It’s the phone, I’ll leave,” he said.

“Ignore it,” Munechika ordered. “I have the answering machine on.”

After ringing a few more times, they heard the recorded message and a young man’s voice spoke.

“Keigo? Are you there? I couldn’t get you on your cell phone. What the hell are you doing?” The man sounded agitated. The tone of his voice was tinged with arrogance. “I told you I needed to talk to you. You can’t have forgotten? I need to meet you alone. When you get back, call me straight away.”

There was a loud noise of the phone being slammed down.

“Who was that?”

It was none of Shiiba's business, but before he could stop himself the words had already left his mouth.

"It's the president of the Matsukura Group," Munechika replied.

"Your brother?" Shiiba asked.

"You really have done your research," Munechika said with a faint laugh. "That's right. I'm the lovechild of my dad and he's the child of his real wife. We only share half our blood, but he is my brother nonetheless."

"Is he always that arrogant?" Shiiba commented. "I heard that he was younger than you."

"It's all a bluff," Munechika said. "If he didn't do it then there is no way he'd survive in that world. He's desperate. It's sweet. Due to the way things turned out, he was put in my custody at 12. So I know him better than anyone."

Shiiba still wasn't satisfied. It didn't matter if the man was the president, surely it must be annoying to take orders from your little brother. Imagining a placid Munechika, he felt an incomprehensible irritation inside him. It didn't suit Munechika to be the inferior bastard child. He didn't think Munechika was the kind of man to be shackled like that.

"The other members of the group must want you to be the president," he said. "Andou said so."

Munechika was the sort of man who should be at the top, wielding the power. Shiiba had only known him a short while, but he understood the man that much.

"I don't want to," Munechika said. "I want to support him as much as I can while he needs me. But as soon as he's old enough, I'm washing my hands off it all."

Shiiba suddenly realized that in order to let his younger brother succeed, Munechika had devoted himself to the criminal business. If he got too involved in the dealings of the group, then people would force him to become the president. So, even though he was his father's son, he had kept his distance from the group and now only supported his brother like a shadow in the background. This was all only conjecture on Shiiba's part, but he believed that he couldn't be too far from the truth.

"Your brother is a burden, am I right?" he asked.

Munechika muttered that he didn't know.

"Everyone has at least one or two things they can't escape from, right?"

Shiiba continued. "The longer a person lives, the more responsibility he bears."

It was a depressing way to look at things. Munechika was clearly not unhappy at his lot in life. Shiiba didn't fully understand the situation, but he could see that Munechika was unwavering in his decision to help his half-brother.

Shiiba stood up from the sofa. It was best to know as much as possible about someone you were hoping to take as your S. But he was scared to push much further into the recesses of Munechika's heart. He felt a strong sense of foreboding that if he did, he wouldn't be able to get out again.

"Thank you for telling me more about Lin," he said. "But you'll want repayment for that too?"

"Of course," Munechika replied with a leer. "You can pay me back whenever, but it'll be earning interest."

Shiiba wasn't given a chance to reply. He was grabbed by two strong arms and pulled back into the sofa.

Munechika smothered Shiiba's body with his. "A kiss for the interest."

"Not a bad rate," Shiiba managed to say.

Munechika moved to press his lips on Shiiba's. When Shiiba quickly turned his head, Munechika licked his earlobe. When Munechika's warm breath hit the moist skin on his ear, little waves of electricity passed down his spine. Scared at how good it felt, Shiiba shook his head.

"Let go," he said. "Don't get the wrong idea. That was only a taste. I'm not giving you any more. If you want more you have to be mine."

"I said that this was interest," Munechika insisted.

Teasingly, Munechika ran his finger over Shiiba's lips. He could have remained stubborn and fled from the room, but Shiiba hesitated, the strength had left his body. Whether it was a sampler or interest, Shiiba should probably compensate Munechika for the valuable information he'd just forked over.

Shiiba started to oblige and placed his lips on Munechika. Before he knew it, the kiss had grown passionate. It was so different from the other kiss. Munechika's hands rubbed at his cheeks over and over. It was a kiss that tasted so sweet on his lips. It was as sweet as candy to Shiiba.

"...No..."

"Huh?" Munechika cocked his head.

"We can't do that," Shiiba gasped.

"What can't we do?"

Shiiba looked back at the man who was irritated about being interrupted. "If you're hungry, then get a snack," he said.

"No, your lips are so much sweeter," Munechika whispered.

It was seduction. Munechika ignored the glare on Shiiba's face and kissed him again. Shiiba knew that Munechika was enjoying the idea that someone might walk in on them with their lips locked. He licked and nibbled gently. Shiiba's lips finally let down their defenses and, before he knew it, he had allowed Munechika full access to the interior of his mouth.

Letting this one thing slip meant the rest of it came tumbling down after. With Munechika's tongue deep in his mouth, Shiiba's body started reacting. Munechika pulled the tucked-in shirt from Shiiba's pants and pushed his hand in. When the warm hand touched Shiiba's skin, he broke out in goose bumps.

"Who said you could do this...stop...no...ngh..."

He tried to plead between kisses but the words didn't seem to reach Munechika. The man was insatiable. Giving up on the kisses, Munechika licked his neck sensually and started rubbing his chest. He started out softly, but then quickly moved on to pinching. Shiiba's breathing just got more and more erratic.

"Shall I return the favor for earlier?" Munechika whispered as he undid Shiiba's belt buckle. Undoing the zipper, he pushed his hand in, but Shiiba pushed back with all his might.

"You don't have to return the favor," Shiiba exclaimed.

"I want to service you. This is going to be a relationship of give and take."

Shiiba could hear the sarcasm in Munechika's tone. He turned away, but Munechika brought his face up close with an unexpected gentleness.

"Shiiba, you're acting like a stressed-out cat. Relax. See what another man can do for you. It'll feel good and you'll feel better. You must be tired with all that hard work. Just unwind. "

At Munechika's gentle words, not only Shiiba's body, but also the defenses in his heart were breached. He threw away not only his pride as a detective, but also as a man. He put his body in the care of Munechika's arms.

Shiiba licked his dry lips. His brain was telling him to stop, but Munechika's words had been such sweet seduction. The parts of him that had been so firm, Shiiba felt were weaknesses. His personality hadn't changed, but for a few moments, he discarded the heavy, stiff armor he wore from day-to-

day. If he could throw himself unarmed into this, then maybe he would be happier. Tired of thinking, Shiiba let himself go with the flow.

“I like strong-willed cats,” Munechika said, “but cats are best when they sit and let themselves be stroked.”

“You want me to purr too?” Shiiba asked sarcastically.

“I’m sure you can make a sexier sound than that,” Munechika answered.

He knelt on the floor and lowered his head towards Shiiba’s crotch. Shiiba felt the warm breath on it, and the warm saliva, which was starting to cover his member. Not being able to contain it, he let out a small groan.

When Munechika took the whole cock into his mouth, as if that was what it had hoped for, Shiiba’s cock hardened immediately. When Munechika’s lips closed down on it, little shock waves ran through Shiiba’s body.

“....Ngh...mmm....”

He issued little groans. Munechika, to annoy him, nibbled a little bit on it.

“Do it properly...” Shiiba groaned.

Munechika laughed. He pushed his hands behind Shiiba’s back and, finding the crack in Shiiba’s ass, he started to finger the sensitive part. Shiiba reflexively reacted as if to move away, but that just pushed his cock further into Munechika’s mouth. Either way, he was going to be penetrated. Shiiba was flustered.

“What...don’t...don’t touch there...stop that.”

“Don’t make a fuss. I’m just stroking you. This is going to make you feel so good.” Shiiba held on to Munechika’s hair, still distressed at this latest act.

“Stop complaining. I’ll make you come in no time.”

“It’s all right...I don’t think I...”

Munechika started moving his mouth again so Shiiba couldn’t finish his sentence. Munechika was sucking hard on him and was moving his moist lips up and down. The finger had made its way into his back passage and was starting to wriggle inside. He didn’t know if what he was feeling now was pleasure or not. But rather than being embarrassed at having Munechika touch him there, Shiiba was feeling more excited.

“No...Mmm...Munechika, please...”

His orgasm was building, Shiiba couldn’t turn back now. All the blood rushed to his crotch and his back arched. Holding his breath, he released his passion into Munechika’s mouth. Munechika swallowed it down just like Shiiba

had done only 10 minutes ago.

Regaining his breath, Shiiba pulled his clothes straight and let Munechika do his shirt buttons. Shiiba wasn't used to having other people do things for him. He felt bad.

“Want a drink? I have some alcohol?” Munechika asked him.

Shiiba swept the hair that had fallen over his eyes. He silently shook his head to decline the drink. He felt uncomfortable, acting like lovers after the deed.



“I have something I want to ask you,” he said instead.

“What? You’re very inquisitive today,” Munechika teased.

“Munechika, what do you think of me? You must hate me.”

Munechika’s gentle smile disappeared. “Why would I hate you? Because you always say annoying things?”

“No, it’s just that you often look at me with such cold eyes. I don’t think it’s because I’m a detective. It looks like you really dislike me...or is it because I didn’t protect Andou?”

Munechika muttered in annoyance, “You shouldn’t be asking such questions straight after sex. Such a turn off.”

“If I hurt your feelings, I’m sorry,” Shiiba apologized. His timing was wrong. But he didn’t want to linger here more than was necessary. The lovemaking was part of a bargain. Nothing else.

“I don’t dislike you,” Munechika admitted. “At first, you annoyed me, I can’t deny that I wanted to hurt you.”

“What were you annoyed about?”

“I couldn’t stand that you hadn’t saved him. I felt so helpless that I could only watch. I guess both of us feel responsible in some way for Andou’s death.”

Munechika looked like he truly despised himself. Shiiba knew how he felt. He had originally had the same feelings towards Munechika.

“The first night that you came here, you wanted to make sure that Andou’s last bit of information wasn’t wasted, and I almost agreed with you. But now...” Suddenly Munechika stopped.

Shiiba waited, but nothing further came. Munechika just stood there, stock still, looking at Shiiba. Shiiba stood up, not being able to take the silence.

“I’m going.”

When he tried to leave the room, Munechika called him back in a low voice, “You’re like a cat with a cold. Why won’t you let someone pet you?”

“What do you mean?”

Munechika muttered that it didn’t matter. His eyes were dark. Shiiba knew that he had hurt him.

“Don’t go near Lin,” Munechika warned. “For your own sake.”

He wanted to say something in return but nothing would come to him.

“Good night.”

With that, Shiiba opened the door and left.

Chapter 8

Exiting Shinjuku station, Shiiba quickly made his way to his destination.

Today was much colder than before. His breath condensed to a fine white mist when it hit the winter air. Feeling the cold mostly on his face, Shiiba tried to warm his face with his hands. He shivered, although this wasn't entirely due to the temperature.

This was going to be his second meeting with Lin. Shiiba had not gotten permission from his supervisors. He had asked Takasaki over and over again, but the only reply he had received was a "don't do anything." They were thinking that although it looked like a lizard, if he tried to grab the tail, then it might turn out to be a horrible monster. Shiiba understood his superior's hesitations.

Shiiba had reason to suspect that his superiors didn't intend to secure Lin. If Lin was arrested ineptly, then the investigation could take them as far as the Chinese embassy. They wanted to leave anything like that well alone.

Shiiba, however, couldn't drop his interest in Lin. He wanted to get to the organization at the source of the distribution chain. He was resolved. He was now ignoring orders and proceeding on the case alone. In the worst-case scenario, he may have to quit the police. But whatever happened, he couldn't back out now.

He went to the same hotel where he had met Lin the first time. Knocking on the door of the room that he had been told to come to, Lin opened the door to him in cheerful spirits.

"Welcome," Lin greeted. "I am so happy to meet you again. Please, I have made us drinks."

The room was the executive suite on the top floor. The lights had been dimmed. Because the room was dark, you could see the entire night scene out of the large windows.

Sitting on the sofa, Lin offered him the drink. The logo was in Chinese. Taking a sip, Shiiba choked.

"Hey, hey, are you okay?" Lin inquired.

"What is this? It's quite strong," Shiiba said hoarsely.

"It's Moutai, traditional Chinese liquor," Lin explained. "In China, it's very normal to drink it straight, but it is around 60% alcohol, so it may be difficult to

drink if you are not used to it. Shall I add some water to your glass?"

Lin diluted the alcohol, but it was still pretty strong. If Shiiba didn't drink it, he could hurt Lin's feelings so, while exchanging pleasantries with Lin, Shiiba slowly put the liquid into his body.

"Mr. Lin, can I count on you?" he finally asked. Lin looked delighted. "But, what I want isn't what you showed me. I need something with no markings. Can you get me that? I think Andou told you already. My passion for guns means I'm very interested in the unusual items. If I can have those guns, then I may want to buy more later. What do you think?"

Lin looked calculating, then smiled. "That will be no problem. To obtain it in China will take a little while, however."

Lin said that when it arrived in Japan, he would inform Shiiba.

Shiiba then probed further. "Where do you make these guns with no marks?"

There were several arms factories in China, but the two military-run ones were Poly Technologie and Norinco. As Lin was a military man, there was a good chance that it was from one of these. However, it was difficult to think that a named company that worked overseas would be making and transporting guns without markings. To have no markings at all meant that they could only be destined for the black-market.

"That is a secret," Lin replied. "In China, there are many weapons factories. It is a military secret so I cannot tell you the location of the factories. But I tell you Mr. Shibano, if Japan and China were to go to war, then Japan would lose in a day." Lin smiled comfortably. He evidently had a lot of pride in his home country. The Japanese government and the police were nothing, that's what Lin thought. After a pause, he asked, "Mr. Shibano, do you have an interest in China?"

"Yes. I do indeed. I would like to visit soon."

"Really? Well then you should let me show you my home country. I can take you to places that you would not be allowed to go normally. It will be very enjoyable."

Shiiba remembered that Munechika's Yakuza friend had been shown around weapons factories in China by Lin. Lin must have a very high position in the military to be able to take a foreigner into restricted military facilities.

Shiiba needed to know more. The guns that were made in China, how did this man get them through? Shiiba knew that he managed to bring them into

Japan. Where did those guns then go? Shiiba craved so much more.

Lin then said something to Shiiba, which he thought was strange.

“Mr. Shibano, I very much like you. I want us to be closer.”

“I feel the same,” Shiiba agreed.

Suddenly, Lin stood up and sat next to him. “Can we take our time tonight? Will you stay the night?” Lin looked persistent. He gripped Shiiba’s hand.

Shiiba tried to remain composed, but his skin broke out in goose bumps. Andou had been right about him. “Mr. Lin, I’m sorry, but I’m not inclined that way.”

Pulling his hand away, Shiiba tried to reject him. Shiiba was not a gigolo who could be bought with money. Despite the fact that that hadn’t stopped him last time. “If you want, I could introduce you to some sweet boys.”

Shiiba forced a grin as he stood up. He wanted to end this meeting now. Maybe it was because he knew this man had beaten up women before, or perhaps it was just a feeling in his gut. Either way, he didn’t want to be with Lin anymore now.

“I want you,” Lin said, grabbing him.

The effects of the alcohol meant that Shiiba easily lost his balance and collapsed on the floor.

“Let go of me,” Shiiba growled.

His body had twisted when he fell. He hit his head on the table’s edge as he tried to get up. The swimming sensation in his head wouldn’t stop and Shiiba knelt on the floor. He wasn’t a lightweight when it came to alcohol. He put his hand to his forehead. It was then that he realized that he was losing sensation in his limbs. This was strange. He couldn’t be that drunk. He put his hand out on the sofa, desperately trying to support his body, but he was feeling worse.

“Are you all right?” Lin murmured. “You mustn’t be used to such strong alcohol. Why don’t you rest on the bed?”

“What did you put in my drink?” Shiiba gasped. “Mr. Lin...what are you going to do?”

Lin looked at Shiiba with his usual grin. His smile was unnatural. It made Shiiba feel sick to his stomach.

“If you do anything strange... then...the deal...is off...” Shiiba said weakly.

He felt as if his heart was going to stop. Through his wavering

consciousness, Shiiba looked at Lin. When had Lin found out? Shiiba had been so careful.

“How did I find out you were a detective?” Lin asked, as if reading his thoughts. “You still don’t know? Well I’ll tell you. The incense burner that I gave you, it had a wooden stand, remember? In there, I hid a bug. After I met you, you met a superior in Shibuya, didn’t you? I heard your conversation. I was surprised that such a pretty boy could be a detective. A great shame.”

Lin did not seem afraid despite knowing that he was being investigated by the Japanese police. The support from the Chinese government seemed to make him confident of himself and his position. “Your superior stopped the investigation. It was the obvious decision. But you decided to carry on alone. You shouldn’t have disobeyed orders.”

Lin squatted down and embraced Shiiba. He wasn’t a big man, but he managed to lift Shiiba up. Shiiba didn’t have the strength to resist. Lin carried him to the bed and stripped him. From a bag next to the bed Lin started to pull out strange objects. First, the man restrained him with black leather belts that were used in S&M play. Shiiba shivered. His legs struggled, trying to escape. But the belts were tight enough so that he couldn’t move. There was nothing he could do.

Around his neck was wrapped another black leather belt. From the neck down he was covered in thin belts, and his wrists were tied behind him. He had no freedom of movement.

“This suits you,” Lin purred.

“What...no...do you think that you’re going to get away with this?” Shiiba’s words were disjointed. Catching a glimpse of what Lin had in his hand now, Shiiba took a sharp intake of breath. Lin had a camera.

“We’re just going to play,” Lin said. “Consensual play. I’ll take lots of naughty photos. If you stop the investigation then the photos will stay between just you and me.”

“A threat...I don’t care...if those photos...are circulated...”

“Really? It’ll look like you’re enjoying it in the photos. It’ll be quite a scandal for a detective to be involved in S&M photos. You might be fine, but what about your family?”

At those words, Shiiba froze. Lin was right. He might be okay. But his disgrace would reflect on Shinozuka too. His brilliant brother-in-law would lose his footing on the elite road he was taking. Shiiba couldn’t let it happen.

He'd been thoughtless. He had underestimated Lin. Shiiba wanted to curse his own carelessness. On Lin's bed were placed adult toys and whips. He was now going to torture Shiiba in some grotesque hedonistic display.

"I think that you're not going to be able to move for a while from the drug," Lin said, "but you can still feel, right? If you can't, it won't be any fun."

Shiiba felt sick to his stomach.

"I liked you the first time I saw you," Lin continued. "You are so beautiful. I want to see that proud face full of shame. I wonder how distorted it will look. Imagining you screaming for mercy makes me so hard."

Lin's face looked so engrossed as he selected a whip. It was a thin leather whip. Shiiba's chest tightened before it had even touched him.

"...Ngh."

A sharp blade of pain ran from his chest to his hips. Shiiba couldn't take it. Lin swung the whip down for a second go. The intensity took Shiiba's breath away. After the initial pain had subsided, he was left with a dull burning feeling. It was like his chest had been scorched.

"Whip marks look good on your white skin," Lin crooned. "I'll make you look even cuter. Before that, let's try this."

Lin picked up a small wrapped object. Unwrapping the foil, he took out what looked like a capsule.

"This is very effective," he said. "You'll get hard straight away and you won't be able to do a thing about it."

No way, Shiiba thought. Lin stretched his arm out to Shiiba's ass and then pushed the capsule deep inside. It was some kind of suppository. Shiiba felt the foreign body being pushed up inside of him. He felt so defiled.

"It'll dissolve quickly," Lin murmured. "Then we shall see."

Shiiba was still lying face down and now Lin had in his hand a vibrator. It was a round plastic vibrator and he gently slipped it up inside Shiiba. Flicking the switch, the motor started.

As the motor hummed, Lin took a picture. Tied up, whip marks on his chest and a sex toy sticking out of his ass, knowing that he had been well and truly framed, Shiiba's despair turned black before his eyes. If this got out into the world... If Shinozuka saw it...if this was seen...that was what he was most scared of. He couldn't bear the thought.

"Next, come here."

Shiiba was turned round so he was face up again. Lin put a small ring-like object around his penis. It seemed that this also had a vibrate function and Lin switched this on too, starting up the motor.

The vibrating motion pleased his penis. There was nothing he could do. Lin looked on, pleased at the shamed and humiliated man before him.

"How is it?" he asked. "Feel good? Which feels best? Shall we make it stronger? Here."

Lin flicked the switch and the vibrator in Shiiba's anus moved faster. It was strange that he was not sensitive in that place.

The ring over his penis had elastic properties. It expanded as Shiiba hardened, never stopping with its delicate vibrations. It wasn't enough to make him come, but it still heightened Shiiba's state of arousal.

"Oh, there is a little drool coming from your sweet mouth," Lin said. "The ring isn't enough. Let's make it stronger."

"No...no more..." Shiiba pleaded.

His protests were ignored. The ring around his penis moved more violently. Shiiba felt the force shoot through his entire body.

"...Ah...ngh...mm..."

He tried to bite back the moans issuing from his mouth. The pleasure was building inside him like a whirlpool, which tormented him even more. Contrary to his will, his body was reacting. He couldn't stop himself.

"That's right," Lin purred. "Move your hips. Feels good, doesn't it? Make all the dirty sounds you want, it turns me on even more."

Lin started taking more photos. His eyes glistened with sexual excitement. It disgusted Shiiba so much, he wanted to puke. He decided to shut his mouth tightly.

Lin looked slightly disappointed.

"So shy," he said, pouting. "But you're a dirty boy who needs punishment, aren't you?"

Lin took out the vibrator and removed the ring. Without the vibrations, Shiiba could relax a little. But this time, Lin whipped him even worse.

Alternating between strong lashes and weak lashes, Lin covered Shiiba's entire body with whip marks.

"...Ngh...ah..." Shiiba threw his head back in pain and bit down on his lip. He didn't want to give Lin the pleasure of hearing him beg again. Whatever he did, he wanted to stay strong until the end. If he could just keep going...

"Shall we get onto this then?" Lin asked.

Giving up on the whip, he took out a large vibrator, his favorite of all his toys. It was a terrifyingly large object.

If Lin moved that thing inside him, Shiiba was afraid of what it might do to him.

"What about this one?" Lin said. "So big. I'll help you push it up into that tight ass of yours. Right up inside. But if you like it, that won't be a punishment. So we're going to do this without lube."

Lin pushed Shiiba onto his stomach, and shoved a pillow underneath him. Shiiba's hips lifted with the movement, presenting his behind. Lin caressed the two buttocks and pushed the vibrator into his tight passage.

"You've not taken it from behind much, have you?" Lin mocked. "It's so good. You're just like a girl."

Shiiba's muscles tightened, desperately trying to reject the vibrator. As if to mock this feeble display of resistance, Lin pushed even harder. It was going in. The entire thing—

It was then that they heard something. Lin stopped. It was a knocking at the door. A quiet but persistent knocking.

"Who is that? I'm busy," he growled.

Lin left the bed to see who the visitor was, evidently annoyed by this intrusion. Shiiba couldn't see much from the bed.

"What is it?" he heard Lin snarl.

"I was told that this was Mr. Tanaka's residence?" a voice said.

"What?" Lin yelled. "There's been a mistake. Go and check at the front desk."

Lin was cut off and there was some kind of commotion going on outside. Shiiba thought that he could hear some kind of groaning noise. He guessed that something was happening, but he couldn't move. However, he could sense the presence of a few people entering the room.

Then two men wearing dark business suits appeared, supporting Lin on both sides. Shiiba couldn't be sure whether Lin was conscious or not since

there was a black bag pulled over his head. His body tensed up.

“Who are...” he began, desperately trying to get up. But he could only lift his head a little.

Ignoring Shiiba’s questions, one of the men turned a little to let another pass.

On seeing the person behind them, Shiiba was stunned. His eyes and mouth went wide open, he looked like an idiot.

“What—you—how—why—”

Munechika put his finger to his lips. He was indicating to stay quiet, but Shiiba didn’t understand what was going on. Kaname quickly turned Shiiba round and attempted to undo the restraints. He turned to Munechika when he realized it wasn’t that simple and whispered that they needed a key. Munechika was agitated. He wrapped Shiiba’s completely naked body in a bed sheet then he lifted Shiiba up onto his shoulders.

“Hey...” Shiiba protested. He tried to twist his body away, but he still had not gotten back his strength.

Kaname asked the men to do something and then started walking in front of Munechika. Opening the door, he checked their surroundings and quickly proceeded down the corridor. Carrying Shiiba, Munechika followed behind.

They got into a staff-only elevator and started to descend to another floor. Another voice indicated that they were there. Through a crack in the sheets, Shiiba could only make out a hotel staff’s uniform.

They got into the parked Benz with Kaname in the driver’s seat and Munechika settling into the back, placing Shiiba beside him. The tires of the Benz screeched as the car sped off. They flew onto the expressway at a terrifying speed.

After a while, finally Munechika spoke. “Kaname, are we being followed?”

“It doesn’t look like it now,” Kaname answered.

“I see. Shiiba, you can come out now,” Munechika said, pulling the sheet back.

Shiiba was lying on his side in the back seat. With Munechika’s help, he sat up straight.

“When we get out of the car, we’ll set you free, just hold on a little longer,” Munechika said.

“I don’t get it...what...those men, who were they? Did they kill...Lin?” Shiiba managed to ask.

He still couldn’t speak properly and his voice came out in spurts. But the

drug was certainly wearing off, and he was getting strength back in his muscles.

Perhaps due to the suppository that Lin had inserted, Shiiba's bottom half burned. The drug had dissolved and had been absorbed, so he was starting to feel its effects.

"I wouldn't be so stupid as to kill that man," Munechika said. "He's just having a little nap. Those guys are associates of mine. It was necessary to have someone look after Lin, so the men stayed there."

Shiiba still couldn't handle what had happened. While he was still dealing with his confusion, the car pulled up silently at a residential street. Kaname stopped the car right in front of the entrance of a house.

"This is...?" Shiiba asked.

"It's my safe house," Munechika answered. "Can you walk?"

Nodding, Shiiba got out of the car after Munechika. But as soon as he took one step, his knees gave way and he tumbled to the ground. Munechika gently picked him up.

"Idiot," Munechika said. "If you can't walk, just say so. Jeez. You're really stubborn."

Kaname proceeded ahead and opened the door, waiting for them. He didn't say anything as they entered; he only bowed.

"It looks like no one followed us," he said once they were inside. "I'm going back to the hotel. For our peace of mind, there are people stationed outside."

"Thank you," Munechika said.

With that, Kaname left. Still carrying Shiiba, Munechika went into a room with a bed. As he was lowered onto the bed, Shiiba sighed. He didn't like being carried around like an object.

"What was the drug?" Munechika asked.

Shiiba shook his head. "I don't know. He slipped something into my drink which made me unable to move, and then he gave me something to get me excited."

He didn't need to say where Lin had put it. The drug that had been administered last was causing Shiiba more trouble than the first. The place that it had been pushed into ached and itched. It was also making him feel flushed all over. Maybe that was why his skin was feeling unusually sensitive. He could feel absolutely everything that touched his skin. It was a lot like the very beginning of a cold, but without the ill feeling and the fever. Instead, he

just felt more and more excited. His throat was dry and his breathing erratic. He didn't feel entirely like himself.

"Munechika, get me out of these quickly," he begged. His wrists had stopped hurting from the restraints, but he felt embarrassed about looking like this in front of Munechika.

"Hmph. You look good in that get up," Munechika said. "I'll leave you like that for a while. Poetic justice."

Munechika's voice was biting.

Shiiba objected. "I had no choice! I had to for Andou, I have to—" Shiiba didn't get to finish. A large hand suddenly slapped him across his cheek.

"You're an idiot!" Munechika yelled. "How was that for Andou? Do you think he would have been happy with you taking a risk like that? You were just there for yourself. Besides, you should have learned that you're no good at seduction by now."

The words were more of a shock than the slap. Shiiba almost felt like he was being rejected.

"What do you know?" he yelled back. "I have to work alone! I can't rely on anyone. I have to take risks to get information!"

Munechika said nothing. Shiiba realized what a fool he had been. He felt rage for himself more than he did Munechika.

Suddenly, he felt hysterical, like he needed to burst out into tears. He turned his body on the bed, rolling off it and falling prostrate on the floor. Tears of bitter frustration welled up in his eyes and he burst into great sobs.

Munechika sat down next to him and lifted him up back to the bed. Stroking back Shiiba's ruffled hair, he whispered, "Don't cry...I'm sorry. I shouldn't have hit you."

Shiiba wanted to tell him it wasn't because he hit him, but he couldn't find any other excuse for his behavior. He tried his best to calm down. Munechika always seemed to amplify feelings of doubt within him. He didn't understand why, whenever he was with this man his heart seemed so confused. How did this man know how to push all his buttons?

"Well you did it," Munechika continued. "Even though I tried to stop you, you still met with Lin. This was what was going to happen in the end. I couldn't let that bastard do what he wanted with you. And when I went in the room and saw you like that, my blood boiled." Munechika's voice couldn't conceal his jealousy. It made Shiiba feel strange. The way Munechika was

talking was like that of a passionate lover. “Don’t cheapen yourself. You’re worth more than that.”

Munechika’s voice took a strange tone. It was like an old man advising a schoolgirl who had been taking money for dating older men. Even though there was the contradiction that they had entered into their own deal.

But Shiiba didn’t feel a desire to argue now. Instead, he was enjoying the sense of security he felt while being held against this man’s broad protective chest.

Munechika buried his face into the back of Shiiba’s neck. His gentle lips and his warm breath, Shiiba felt it all across his body.

As if he sensed this, Munechika asked him, “Does the drug hurt?”

Shiiba’s breath was shallow. Munechika looked down in concern.

“Yeah. Please. Don’t touch me too much.” Shiiba’s voice was lower than usual. His heart was weakened from not being able to control his own body.

“I can’t help it,” Munechika said, returning to his insolent self. He gave a cheeky smile. “You can tell me to stop. But I can’t do that. You have no idea how sexy you look just now.”

“Don’t be a jerk,” Shiiba said with an indignant expression. He suddenly sucked in his breath. Munechika had slipped his hand under the sheet. The palm of his warm hand was softly stroking Shiiba’s inner thigh, a part of him that was so sensitive. Shiiba shivered under Munechika’s touch. “Let go. I’m serious...”

Munechika’s hands didn’t stop. Instead, they stroked the top of Shiiba’s penis. With both his hands still tied, there was nothing that Shiiba could do to stop the ministrations.

“Already hard?” Munechika teased. “You’ve been hard ever since the hotel. That must be sore. I’ll make you feel better.”

“No. I don’t need that. Let me out of these restraints. I can deal with it myself.”

“Sorry, I don’t need to see you do that tonight. Oh, that’s right. Why don’t you pay back all your debt tonight?”

Munechika pushed Shiiba’s shoulders. He fell down with a thud back on the bed. While holding Shiiba down, Munechika took off his own shirt.

“Munechika, why don’t I pay you back some other time?” Shiiba pleaded. “I really need a rest tonight...”

Because of the drugs, his body felt different. He didn’t know what might

happen if Munechika touched him like this.

“I want it tonight,” Munechika insisted. “Just let me...Shiiba, I want you tonight.” Munechika’s low voice sounded composed, but he was shaking a little.

Shiiba didn’t know whether this was out of fear or anticipation. Munechika threw off the sheet entirely. Shiiba closed his eyes. To be completely naked in front of another man, he hadn’t felt it then, but now he felt shy.

A hand reached between Shiiba’s legs and with rhythmic movements, started to urge Shiiba on. It was too much for Shiiba who was already feeling a high state of arousal. His whole body was hot. He was losing his wits.

At some point, Shiiba had started moving his hips to match Munechika’s hand movements. His body was in absolute agony. However, his legs opened of their own accord. His mind said he didn’t want to do this, but his body submitted to his true desires.

“It’s almost like once it’s up, it’s never coming down again,” Munechika commented lewdly.

Munechika suddenly stopped his vigorous hand movements. Shiiba, at the height of pleasure, had almost been released. He almost cried with irritation. Opening his eyes, they met with Munechika’s who was now looking down at him.

“Say it,” Munechika said.

“Huh...?” Shiiba asked, still dazed with lust.

“Tell me you want me,” Munechika said. “Ask me to sleep with you.” He started caressing Shiiba again to add emphasis to his words. His actions were gentler and were intent on having Shiiba say the words. “If you ask me to sleep with you, then, I’ll let you have what you want. And, I’ll be your S too.”

Munechika’s heart and body were on the line. It was a skillful plan. And Munechika’s attempt at seduction had almost worked. But Shiiba still didn’t want to say the words that Munechika needed to hear from him. If he did that now, then Munechika may be his S, but the power in the relationship would be decided from the beginning. Shiiba wouldn’t be able to control him.

“No matter how long you wait, I won’t ever say those words,” Shiiba answered firmly, trying to hold back the tide of lust he felt in his own heart.

“Such a strong man...but I wonder if you will stick with that,” Munechika said, turning Shiiba over and grabbing his buttocks. Quick as a flash,

he inserted his finger into the hole.

Feeling a sharp stab of pain, Shiiba's face screwed up.

"This is where he put the drugs, right?" Munechika said. "It's dissolved, but there's still a little left in here."

Shiiba felt a burning sensation where Munechika probed. It wasn't pain he was feeling though, but a pleasure so great it made him want to cry.

There was a squishing sound as Munechika's fingers kept probing in that small hole. The drug had moistened Shiiba's insides.

"....Ah, Ngh..."

It was going to make Shiiba crazy. He couldn't hold back. Emotion and reason left him. All his body could understand was a hot pleasure.

"Just one finger and you can't take any more," Munechika said. "I bet anything fatter would really hurt up here, huh?"

Hearing Munechika whisper only made Shiiba more turned on. He wanted it. He wanted Munechika's cock inside him. He needed it so much he couldn't think of anything else. A hunger. A needful lust.

"Say it," Munechika repeated. "You can't do anything else, right? Just tell me you want it then I'll make you feel better. Shiiba quit police work. Come live with me. I'll look after you."

Shiiba peeked at Munechika. The man was serious. This wasn't Munechika's normal joking-around personality. Shiiba's breathing was irregular and he shook his head.

"I can't," he answered. "I don't want to quit my job. I can't be yours."

Their eyes locked together in wordless resistance to each other. Munechika scrutinized Shiiba. Realizing that he couldn't change Shiiba's mind, he sighed deeply and got up.

"If you really don't want to be mine...you really are a stubborn bastard," he said.

Before Shiiba could tell him to wait, Munechika had already left the room. He returned straight away with a wire cutter. Having the belts cut free, Shiiba finally had his freedom.

"Kaname will bring you your clothes in a bit. Just wait there," Munechika said.

When Munechika tried to leave the room, Shiiba stopped him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm going home. The retreat of the defeated."

Seeing Munechika so down, hurt Shiiba. To keep his own pride, he had trampled on this man's pride instead.

If they parted here he knew that he would never see the man again. Whatever orders he got from his superiors, Shiiba would not be able to see Munechika again. Even Shiiba couldn't be that heartless.

Why did one of them have to be a winner in this game?

"See you, Shiiba," Munechika said. "It was fun."

Munechika opened the door. Watching the retreating man, Shiiba just sat there quietly. He couldn't. He couldn't let Munechika go like this. He wasn't finished with this man.

"Wait. Don't go...don't go Munechika!" he finally yelled.

Munechika stopped hearing the urgency in Shiiba's voice.

"Come here. Come back..." Shiiba cried from the bed.

Munechika looked dubious. "What is it?"

Shiiba gazed unblinkingly at Munechika. His mind was resolute. "I want you. I want you more than anyone."

Munechika looked fierce and then, as if he was exercising, he moved his head around. "I don't get you."

Shiiba simply answered, "Shut up and come here."

Munechika, still glowering at him, approached the bed slowly. Shiiba, with the flexibility of a leopard stalking its prey, quickly jumped on him. Munechika was dumbfounded at the embrace.

"What is this?" he choked.

"I've caught you," Shiiba whispered. "You're mine now, Munechika."

"Surely, that should be my line," Munechika objected.

"No, I'm not yours. You're mine," Shiiba insisted.

Munechika was becoming more and more confused. He pulled away so he could see Shiiba's face. "It's the same thing. You want me?"

"I want you. I want you desperately," Shiiba looked pleadingly up at Munechika.

"What you want is for me to be your S," Munechika said.

For a moment, Shiiba was silent. He wanted Munechika to be his S, but he also wanted Munechika as a man. Thinking of what had happened before between the two of them, there had been high and low points. If he tried to explain it, he wouldn't have been able to make Munechika understand his complicated feelings. He decided that he had to try his best.

“My S is an important partner,” he said slowly. “Whatever happens, I can’t betray my S. When my S is in danger, I have to protect him. I have to lay my life on the line for him. I have to give myself entirely to his welfare. That is what an S is to me.”

At the same time as he was making this vow to Munechika, he was also reminding himself that he hadn’t been able to protect Andou. The words that veteran detective Takehara had said to him floated to mind.

“Your S is like your woman.”

Takehara was right. You couldn’t enter into your relationship with your S halfheartedly. It had to be true devotion. Shiiba knew that now.

“I see. To hear you finally say that makes me happy,” Munechika said. He had understood Shiiba’s meaning. The desire to look inside Shiiba disappeared from his eyes. “Anyway, now that I’m yours, does that mean I get as many treats as I want?”

It was a line that only Munechika could say with a straight face. Shiiba’s lips curled up into a wide smile.

Chapter 9

Munechika pulled all his clothes off and lay down on top of Shiiba. Their skin touched. The warmth of another's skin on his was more than Shiiba could take. At just the feeling of having nothing between them, Shiiba's excitement increased all the more.

When they embraced, he realized something. He realized that he had always craved for Munechika. He wanted all of Munechika. The passion that he had held back inside him burst out like a geyser. It scared him. This wasn't just the side effect of some drug.

"Is this really your first time with a man?" Munechika asked.

"Yes, how many times do I have to tell you?" Shiiba said with some force. But his lower half was quivering with lust for Munechika. He was eagerly awaiting Munechika's passion.

Munechika ran a finger down Shiiba's white chest. When he touched the marks left by the whip, Shiiba felt a sting of pain.

"That bastard," Munechika growled. "There were some interesting toys on that bed. He was using them too?"

Shiiba nodded. "A vibrator. A ring that went around my penis. And then that thing he was going to use when you burst in."

"What a pervert," Munechika said in disgust. "Well, how were they? What do you think of the toys? Think you'd want to use them again?"

"Hmm. They did feel good, but I don't think I'll get to like them. I can do that myself." Shiiba then grabbed Munechika's hard penis that was in the space between them. "You want this."

Munechika grinned. "I do."

In retaliation, he grabbed Shiiba's ass with his large hands. "You want it in here?"

"Yes. I want you. Don't taunt me. Just do it."

Munechika laughed at how compliant Shiiba was now. Shiiba laughed too and grabbed Munechika's hips.

"I don't know," Munechika teased. "This is your first time, but you make it sound like you do this all the time. You better not say afterwards that you didn't like it. Anyway, let's give you a little something first."

“No, I don’t...ah...mm...” In the middle of his protest, Shiiba’s words changed to sweet groans of pleasure because Munechika had buried his face between Shiiba’s legs. Being suddenly pulled so deep into Munechika’s mouth threw Shiiba into a violent whirlpool of pleasure. “Ngh...ah...”

Munechika’s tongue licked Shiiba’s penis from the base to tip. Hesitating for a moment at the tip with little kisses, Munechika then sucked on Shiiba. It felt so good now that Shiiba couldn’t even moan. He just gasped and pulled at Munechika’s hair. He had been hard for such a long time now, and under Munechika’s caresses, he felt himself coming to an orgasm straightaway.

“Ah...I’m...ngh....Munechika...” He arched his back and shook his head, issuing cries of pain. Shiiba couldn’t hold himself back. He shot off into Munechika’s mouth.

His breath was short and sharp. At the height of his pleasure, he had closed his eyes and kissed Munechika’s head lying on his chest.

“What a groan. Hearing you is enough to make me hard,” Munechika said.

“That’s...a...good thing...my voice...” Shiiba managed to gasp.

“Shh. That was only the lead up to the main course...my Magnum.”

“Before you fire it, put it in.” Shiiba laughed and turned over.

Munechika lay over him and Shiiba could feel Munechika’s cock brush against his buttocks. In front of Munechika, he opened his legs. His arousal and desire had now overcome any feeling of embarrassment he once had.

“Shall we use some lube?” Munechika said.

“No, there is still some drug left in there,” he answered.

“I’ll be gentle,” Munechika whispered.

He put his penis near Shiiba’s entrance hole. Slowly, he pushed it in. It was entirely different from a finger. Shiiba was in so much pain, he almost thought that he was going to be torn apart down there. He was still drugged though, so he didn’t care about the pain anymore. To the contrary, he was impatient for Munechika. Impatient at Munechika’s slow pace, Shiiba pushed his own hips back.

“More, move...” he gasped.

“Don’t rush things,” Munechika scolded. But Munechika was just as excited, and he soon started to thrust in with more force.

Shiiba felt enormous pleasure. Munechika’s large cock was filling him up inside. All the muscles in his body tensed with pleasure.

“Damn you,” Munechika grunted. “This is too good. I won’t be able to hold on...get up.” He lifted Shiiba’s body up and sat him on his knees.

Facing each other like this made Shiiba feel the shyness he had managed to overcome. He began to worry.

“What do I do?” he asked.

“Do what feels good,” Munechika advised.

Hesitantly, Shiiba started to move his hips, but with Munechika watching, he couldn’t focus on what he was doing.

“Sit up,” he said. “I can’t do this with you watching.”

Embracing him, Munechika lifted Shiiba up and then started licking Shiiba’s chest while he caressed Shiiba’s cock.

But Shiiba needed more.

“This isn’t enough,” he groaned.

“You can’t just get by on one course,” Munechika said.

With Munechika still deep inside of him and pleasuring him in the front, Shiiba lost track of where he enjoyed being pleased the most. He’d gone past simple arousal, Shiiba was almost lost in a dream, but his body kept moving.

“...Ngh, Munechika...Ah...”

“More, you want more?” Munechika gasped.

Shiiba shook his head furiously. Munechika was pounding up inside him over and over. And each time he did, a sweet moan issued from Shiiba’s mouth.

As if Munechika thought he might be able to taste those groans, he kissed Shiiba. His tongue also reached deep down inside Shiiba.

Shiiba couldn’t hold on much longer. He was feeling something else building inside him, much different from when he was going to shoot off. Shiiba got down from Munechika’s knees and asked Munechika to enter him while he was on all fours.

“Come here. I want you to take me from behind.” Turning around, he invited the man to take him. Munechika hesitated. “Please. Don’t leave me like this.”

Munechika grabbed Shiiba’s hips and pushed his cock in all at once.

Shiiba arched his back, pushing his ass higher up and accepting the man deeper. He was no longer bashful at what he was doing. The reason must be that, deep down, Shiiba loved Munechika in his heart.

The first night when Munechika had watched him masturbate, he had

imagined what Munechika had been telling him. Now those images resurfaced, overlapping with his current situation. That night had been when all of this had started.

“Munechika...No...I can't hold on....”

His heart and his body leapt at the same time. Reason had left him. This man who was now his; now, he wanted to be this man's. He wanted all of it. He wanted to be consumed by this feeling. His body. His heart. He didn't want to leave anything. He wanted to give it all to Munechika.

“I can keep up. Don't get stressed. You'll boil over.”



He felt it. Munechika's body made him feel close to danger.

"Ahh. I'm coming....Mm..."

His body was reaching the climax. What goes up, must come down. The moment when your heart and body become one.

"...Ngh."

Munechika shot far up inside Shiiba. Shiiba in that moment, reached and fell from the pinnacle of pleasure.

Moving a single finger was a bother, but Shiiba needed a smoke.

"Do you have a cigarette?" he asked.

"Yeah, somewhere here," Munechika replied and walked around the room looking. "Here they are."

Taking the lighter and cigarettes that Munechika offered, Shiiba lay on his side as he took a leisurely puff. He felt worn out, heart and body. He wanted to take a shower, but he really couldn't move.

"Stop smoking. It's bad for you," Munechika scolded.

Shiiba raised an eyebrow. "Are you my mother? I didn't think a Yakuza would be saying that to me."

"Health is first, even for a Yakuza," Munechika replied and taking the cigarette from Shiiba's mouth, stubbed it out in the ashtray.

"I'm cold," Shiiba complained.

"Hm? Do you want me to turn the heating up?" Munechika asked.

"Idiot. I'm telling you to come here," Shiiba said throwing off the covers.

Munechika snorted. "Want to go for another round?"

"No. I'm just cold."

Munechika slipped his body next to Shiiba's. The touch of his skin and his warmth was better than what any blanket could do.

"Anyway, how did you know to come to that hotel?" Shiiba asked.

"I just guessed that you would be in danger," Munechika answered.

"Don't lie to me," Shiiba said. "Your timing was perfect. You were talking about being tailed in the car. Explain what happened."

Munechika sighed and started explaining. "My timing was good because I had listening devices in the room."

"Listening devices?"

"Shut up and listen," Munechika grumbled. "I'd had my eye on Lin for a

while. He's been selling guns to Yakuza for a long time now, but his methods are dirty. My group was starting to grumble about him. We shared a lot of acquaintances through my legitimate business, so I was told to find out more about Lin. I was starting to discover how he was selling the guns. I told you that he was managing weapon exports in Japan, but that actually had nothing to do with his black market guns."

"What?"

"He's a government employee," Munechika explained further. "He was dealing with huge amounts of foreign currency, but only earning a small wage himself. So he would use his connections to import guns to Japan and use that to supplement his income. It was a side-business. However, when I had Kaname tail him, he noticed that someone else was watching him too. It seems like Lin has stretched his business too far and he is maybe being watched by his own country, probably the National Security Agency."

The National Security Agency was one of China's intelligence agencies. Shiiba didn't know the details, but their main duties were to dispatch people to do surveillance work in various countries.

"However I looked at it, that guy was bad news. I didn't want to get caught up in something big so I didn't do anything. But then my unarmed princess started meeting with him, disregarding my kind advice."

"Don't say that. So when did you put the listening equipment in?"

"A while ago. Lin always used that room for his gun deals. So I set up a station in the next room, and when he stayed there I'd make sure that someone was there who would then give me a report."

So Munechika had people within the hotel helping him. Shiiba was worried.

"Surely attacking Lin was a bad idea?" he asked, his face troubled.

"Couldn't be helped," Munechika answered, giving a laugh. "I'd have had to let him know at some point. I couldn't be identified so I used men that he didn't know. Now Kaname will be showing him exactly what the Japanese Yakuza are made of. They won't kill him. Just break some bones. If he's smart, he'll stop. Or even better, he'll leave Japan entirely."

Shiiba was listening intently to Munechika's words. If Lin went back to China then the case would be over.

"Shiiba, you can't take this guy on. Leave it," Munechika urged.

Shiiba couldn't agree. Even though he knew that Lin would be difficult to

arrest, he couldn't let the man escape. There must be a way to catch Lin.

"Even though I can't meet with him directly, I won't give up on Lin," he said. "I'm going to continue watching him."

"You're unbelievably stubborn," Munechika said. "Well, that's who you are. I know you will have another chance at him."

"That's what I think too," Shiiba said.

"You need to stop feeling so responsible. It'll only destroy you in the end," Munechika seriously warned.

"I don't need to hear that from you," Shiiba retorted. But tonight, he couldn't disregard Munechika too lightly. "I know it's a shortfall of mine."

Not wanting to waste the information that Andou had given him, he hadn't done enough research and recklessly met with Lin. He'd failed because he hadn't seen the danger. Therefore, he now wanted to prove himself, get results and prove that he hadn't made a mistake.

Pushing him over, Munechika hugged Shiiba from behind.

"Sleep now. You must be tired. When Kaname comes, I'll wake you up."

"Thank you. Hey, Munechika?"

"What?"

"What is your perfume?"

Munechika smiled. "Why?"

"I like it." Even now, the sweet smell was coming off of Munechika's body. It had a sensual smell to it. It was sexy.

"It's Linstand de Guerlain."

Guerlain? Shiiba muttered to himself and closed his eyes. Even Shiiba had heard that name and he wasn't interested in such things usually.

"Linstand is French for moment," Munechika explained. "The concept for the product is that you hope the moment that you fell in love will last for eternity."

"You know a lot," Shiiba murmured.

"The girl who gave it to me told me," Munechika said, smiling. Shiiba knew that this man had been with women, but to think that she might have been special to Munechika hurt Shiiba a little. "Putting a moment and eternity together is a bit of a contradiction."

I suppose, Shiiba thought to himself. Sleep was rapidly taking him. It was true that a moment and eternity were opposite in meaning, but if you thought about what time really was, then eternity was just a never-ending series of

moments.

“Shiiba? Are you asleep?”

He was still awake, but he didn't answer. Munechika pulled the covers up over Shiiba gently.

It was a quiet time. His eyes closed, he had to go, but right now, he wanted to forget everything and sleep. He held on to that moment of bliss when he had been naked, mind and body, with Munechika.

Feeling the warmth of Munechika behind him, Shiiba relaxed and drifted in to a deep sleep.

December 24th.

This was the time of the year that the streets were at their most gaudy. Christmas songs poured out from the open doors of shops, and the illuminations brightly lit the streets.

Another year was drawing to a close. Walking through the crowded December streets brought with it that end of the year feeling. Shiiba's mind was vacant as he lost himself to time.

He hadn't seen Ying Fa Lin since that night. It wasn't because Shiiba had quit his investigation, but because Lin had returned to China. He had no way of knowing whether Lin had been ordered to return or had decided to do so himself.

Even now, he couldn't put Lin behind him. He still met people on the streets from whom he gathered information. What he wanted was real information. Fresh information that would tell him where there were guns.

Walking near Shinjuku Station, his phone rang. He checked who it was first. Shinozuka's name was flashing on the display. Shinozuka rarely called his cell phone. Shiiba answered it wondering why Shinozuka was calling him now.

“Hello,” he said.

“Masaki, it's me. I'm behind you. I tried calling out to you, but you didn't answer. Are you okay?” Shiiba was an undercover detective so Shinozuka's concern was natural. The politeness in Shinozuka's voice though made Shiiba feel more aware of the distance between them and it pained him. “Masaki? What's the matter?”

“No, I'm fine. I would probably cause you trouble if I spoke to you as I am now.”

Shiiba honestly didn't want to talk to Shinozuka, but he was genuinely

concerned that being seen talking in public may not be the best of ideas. He was wearing sunglasses even though it was already dusk. He wore worn-out jeans and a showy coat. To be seen with him would draw attention and maybe invite bad opinions for Shinozuka.

“Don’t worry about that. Can we talk a little?”

Shiiba hung up and Shinozuka walked towards him. This had been the same place where he had seen Shinozuka with that mother and child. The pain of that night floated up fresh in his heart.

“Working?” Shinozuka immediately asked.

“Yes,” Shiiba replied after a pause. “Are you on your way home?”

“Yeah, I had some time so I was just walking around.”

They both walked towards the Southern Terrace. Countless numbers of lights had been fixed along the walkway. The illuminations shone almost like an illusion.

“How is work?” Shinozuka asked.

“It’s all right,” Shiiba replied.

After they had finished the pleasantries, Shiiba cut in. “Shinozuka, it’s something else.”

“Are you going to give me your answer?” Shinozuka asked.

“I’m sorry,” Shiiba said. “I can’t take the exam. I’ve been worrying about whether I should continue to be a detective, but, in the end, working on the field suits me.”

He had chosen his path and he couldn’t throw it away. Even when times got bad. Besides, now he had a new feeling to hold onto, something to keep him going. It was slightly different from hope. It was different from resignation. It was something that he couldn’t put his finger on. For the time being, he would stay where he was. He had decided.

“I see,” Shinozuka said. “You must choose for yourself. I can’t force my opinions on you. I’ll leave it now.”

As if he had anticipated what Shiiba’s reply was going to be, Shinozuka’s face was as passive as always.

“Thank you for being concerned about me,” Shiiba said. “Thank you so much.”

“They’re pretty aren’t they?” Shinozuka suddenly said, looking up at the lights. “When I married Yukari, I was so happy that both of you became my family. We both cared for her so much. I wanted to look out for you too. That

feeling hasn't changed. I've always thought of you as family. I never want you to forget that."

Shiiba understood how Shinozuka was feeling. He understood so he didn't say a thing. He just hung his head. He couldn't offer anything back to this man. He wished that he could smile like he used to, like nothing had happened, but that was so difficult now.

"It's pretty cold tonight. Shall we go back?" Shinozuka turned, then he looked back quizzically when Shiiba didn't do the same. "Masaki? Is there something wrong?"

"I'm going to stay here a little longer," Shiiba said.

Shinozuka nodded sadly. "Well, use this. Be careful not to catch a cold," he said, wrapping a wine colored cashmere scarf around Shiiba's neck. The scarf had retained a little of Shinozuka's own body heat and felt warm against Shiiba's cold neck.

Shiiba looked up puzzled.

Shinozuka smiled. "Let's have dinner again sometime."

Leaving him with that, Shinozuka started to walk off.

Shiiba, without thinking, called him back, "Brother..."

Shinozuka turned around. There was surprise written all over his face. Shiiba hadn't called him that since Yukari's death.

"Thanks for the scarf," Shiiba stammered. "I'll go over to your house soon with a delicious bottle of sake for us to enjoy together."

Stunned, Shinozuka looked at Shiiba for a few moments. He closed his eyes and then, opening them again, he nodded. "I look forward to it. Come over any time. Thank you, Masaki."

Thank you. The short phrase reached deep inside Shiiba. Tightening the scarf around his neck, Shiiba watched as Shinozuka made his way to the station.

Even if he still couldn't accept all of it, tonight he knew that the ill feeling he used to have towards Shinozuka was gradually diminishing. The ill feeling had been a cold well in the back of his chest. It might still be cold, but with a little more time, it would be warmed up by the blood flowing in his body. His heart would finally be warm again.

He felt like something was finished. He felt like he'd finally solved a complicated mathematical problem.

The emotions that people share are of course not something that can be

cleanly solved like a math equation. However much you struggle, you are always tightly bound. But that means you can start again. Your heart is the only problem.

“Flirting with other men?”

He turned, hearing the familiar voice. Standing there was the man he was so very familiar with.

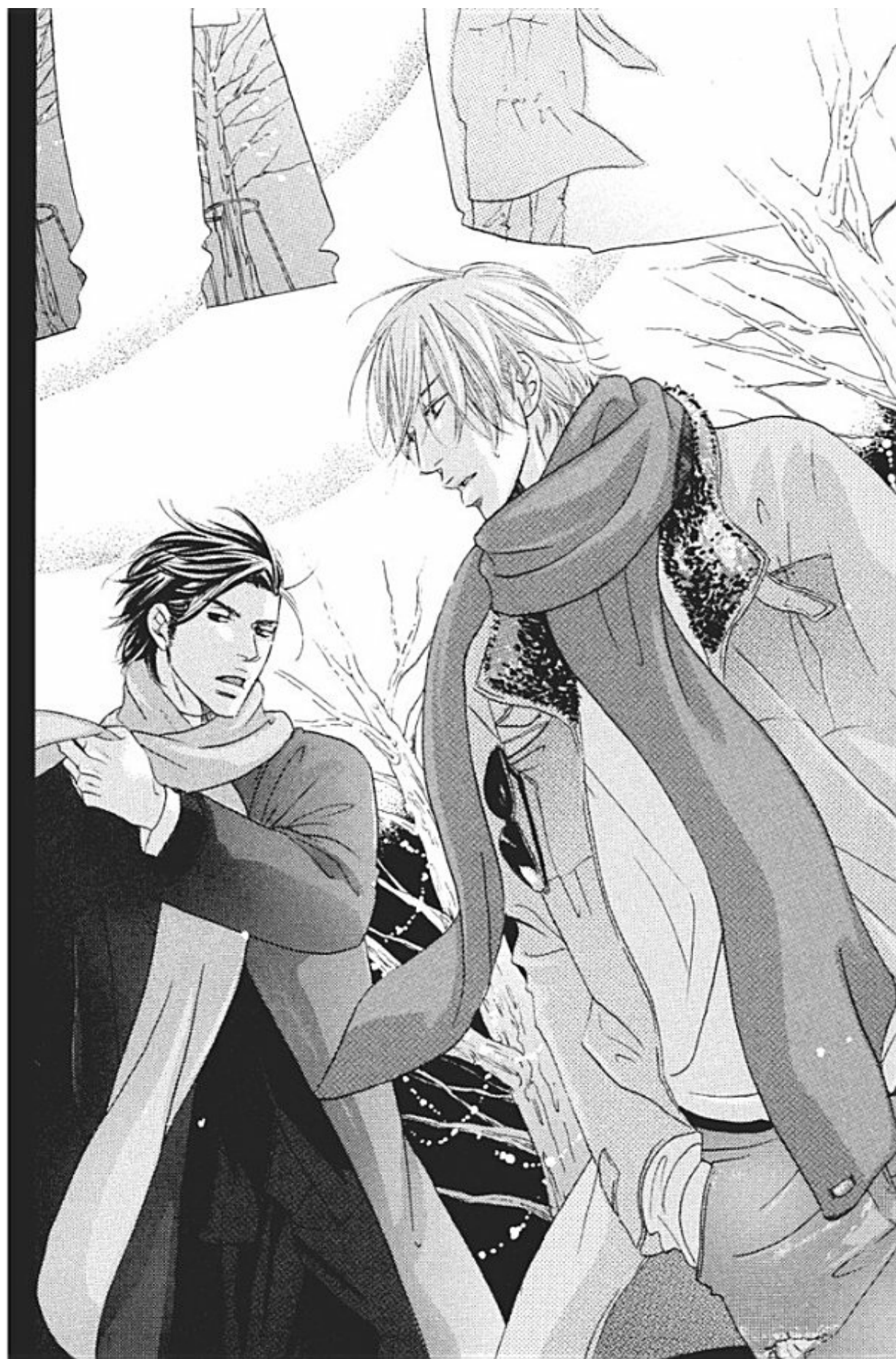
“Coincidence? Or are you stalking me? Why are you here?” Shiiba asked.

“That’s what I want to ask you,” Munechika said. “I just had dinner at the Southern Tower. I come out, and I see this cocky guy wrapping a scarf around your neck. You two were very intimate. Who is he? Found yourself a new S?”

Realizing that Munechika must have just witnessed what had happened, Shiiba felt a little embarrassed. Munechika was the only guy he didn’t want to have seen that.

“It’s not like that,” Shiiba said. “He’s my brother-in-law, my sister’s husband.”

“Oh. Flirting with your sister’s husband. The audacity,” Munechika said, walking away.



Shiiba chased after Munechika who was obviously put out.

“What? Jealous?” he teased.

“...treat,” Munechika muttered.

“Huh?”

“Give me a treat. I’m hungry,” Munechika said, swinging round and looking sullen.

“I thought you said you’d just eaten?” Shiiba said.

“No that,” Munechika insisted.

“Oh, that,” Shiiba said, realizing what Munechika wanted. “I can’t give a reward to a dog that hasn’t done any work.”

“I can’t work on an empty stomach,” Munechika retorted. “You have to look after your dog properly with lots of love. Didn’t anyone tell you that?”

This foolish kind of conversation had become routine between them. It was their own way of communicating.

“Come to my place,” Munechika said.

“No,” Shiiba answered.

“If you don’t, I’ll take a woman home,” Munechika threatened.

“Take who you like,” Shiiba snapped, walking in front of Munechika.

“Hey, wait,” Munechika said, chasing after him. “You think you can get away from me that easily?”

Munechika caught up with him. He was Shiiba’s new S.

Looking over at Keigo Munechika, Shiiba doted on him.

“Idiot,” he thought to himself, “there is no way I would run away from you. Whatever happens, I’m riding this through to the end now. You are mine. You’re all mine. My S...”

Beast's Pride

“Sir, can I have a minute?”

Kaname appeared in the president’s office. Munechika was absorbed in some documents. Raising his head, he replied, “What is it?”

Kaname quietly walked over to his desk. “A phone call from Mr. Motoaki.”
“Motoaki?”

Munechika would not usually be disturbed in the middle of his deskwork for a phone call, but if it was Motoaki then Kaname had probably made the decision that it needed to be answered. Still, he tried to get out of the task.

“Tell him I’m with a customer.”

“He insisted,” Kaname said.

Kaname reached for the phone on the desk and pushed the flashing button. Taking the receiver, Munechika answered his brother.

“Motoaki? What is it?”

“Keigo, why didn’t you come today? I’ve been waiting for you.”

“I’m sorry. I had a lot to do today.”

The person on the phone was the third president of the Matsukura Group, Motoaki Matsukura. They had different mothers. He was younger than Munechika. This year, he would turn 26.

“You’ll come with me to the succession party of the Sumiya Association, won’t you?” Motoaki demanded. “Don’t cancel on me at such short notice.”

“I know,” Munechika said soothingly. “I’ll be there, don’t worry.”

No matter how many times he assured him, Motoaki would always push the point. He was always this distrusting, so Munechika tried to be patient. When he hung up, with perfect timing, Kaname brought him a cup of coffee.

“Now that the meeting with the Sumiya Association is approaching, Motoaki is getting anxious,” Kaname said.

The Matsukura Group was the regional gang of the Koujin Association umbrella organization. There were over 1,000 members in the organization.

The gang boasted the largest number of followers. Munechika knew that there was immense pressure on Motoaki.

“I’m going to attend the party, too. Is my schedule free then?” Munechika said.

“I can adjust it...but is that what you want? I didn’t think that you had to attend?”

Kaname rarely expressed doubt over what Munechika did. He was clearly concerned about Munechika’s position. At such a large meeting of gangsters, there would doubtless be a media presence and police would be keeping surveillance too. Few knew that his business was just a front for other ventures, but for him to arrive publicly at such a place would be like announcing the truth to the world.

“Don’t worry,” Munechika assured him. “Now is the time.”

Kaname looked a little unhappy that Munechika had not heeded his warning. Kaname rarely expressed discontent, but when it came to the issue of Motoaki, he sometimes looked very concerned.

“Mr. Motoaki depends on you too much. He could pose a danger to you,” he warned.

If it had been anyone else, Munechika would have told him to mind his own business, but this was his best secretary and had been by his side for a long time now. He understood Munechika’s affairs better than anyone. He knew that Munechika and Motoaki’s relationship was complex, so advice was not going to work.

Munechika knew that he was too kind on Motoaki. However, they shared the love of blood relations, but also, he felt that a moral debt needed to be paid to Motoaki for a past crime.

He knew that he didn’t need to make up for the crime, but still, he had caused Motoaki a great deal of sorrow, and he couldn’t yet wipe that from his memory. When Motoaki was still young, he took away the most precious thing to him.

“Your brother is a burden, am I right?”

He remembered what Shiiba had said to him once. Maybe Motoaki was a burden. But everyone had them. A burden they couldn’t get away from and would just have to learn to endure its weight.

“I’m sorry for overstepping the mark.” Kaname bowed.

“No, it’s all right. I know what you’re trying to say, but it’s not been a year since Motoaki succeeded our father. We need to look at the long-term.”

Munechika re-organized his papers and stood up. “It’s time to go home. Please get the car.”

The Benz left the company building in west Shinjuku, it exited Oume Street and entered Yasukuni Street. The roads were very busy at this time.

Munechika saw a familiar face near the Shinjuku ward office and ordered Kaname to stop the car. Pulling up to the sidewalk, Munechika opened the window and called out. Shiiba, who had been walking down the street swung round in surprise.

“Get in,” Munechika ordered.

Shiiba pouted for a moment before opening the back door of the car and sliding in next to Munechika.

“Wanna get dinner?” Munechika asked.

“Okay. I’m not hungry though,” Shiiba said, still looking out the window.

Shiiba almost always looked a little annoyed, but Munechika sensed that something else was wrong today. Munechika grabbed his chin and pulled Shiiba to face him.

“What’s up with you today?” There was a blue mark on Shiiba’s right cheek. It looked like a bruise.

“I got caught up in a drunken fight last night.” Looking humiliated, he slapped Munechika’s hand away.

“Did you hit them back?” Munechika inquired.

“I’m a detective,” Shiiba pointed out. “I can’t go and beat up citizens.”

“Shame that you don’t carry your ID with you.”

“Leave it,” Shiiba said. He didn’t mean to be rude, but he wanted to change the subject.

“Come over to my place,” Munechika suggested.

“You want more treats?” Shiiba asked.

“You know me well.”

When Munechika went in for a kiss, Shiiba’s mood turned to rage and he pushed Munechika back.

“What are you doing?” he growled.

“Don’t be shy,” Munechika teased.

“I’m not shy,” Shiiba snapped. “Mr. Kaname, please stop the car.”

Kaname had pulled up before Munechika had a chance to tell him not to. Shiiba quickly opened the door and turned his back on Munechika.

“You don’t take me seriously sometimes,” he said tersely.

“I’m always serious,” Munechika corrected. “I look after you in bed, you know that.”

Shiiba opened his mouth, but in the end, he couldn’t say anything. He slammed the door and then disappeared into the crowd.

“Kaname, don’t just stop like that,” Munechika whined. “Now my princess has gotten away.”

“I’m very sorry,” Kaname said, obviously not sorry.

Munechika raised an eyebrow. “You like him too?”

“Yes, I think he’s very sweet,” Kaname answered in a very serious tone.

Munechika laughed. “Don’t say that in front of him.” He tapped Kaname on the shoulder. “He’d stamp his foot in rage.”

“I’ll be careful,” Kaname said. “Shall we go?”

Kaname once again started up the Benz. The car caught up with Shiiba. As they passed, Munechika got a glance of Shiiba’s profile. The man had a fierce expression on his face. He kept walking the streets with his bruises. He was like a wild animal in Munechika’s eyes. Not working in a pack, but searching out prey alone for that vital information. A beautiful aloof animal. He had his own shackles. He pulled along his own heavy, invisible chains, but he kept struggling forward. Despite things that would topple anyone else, he didn’t fear them. Sometimes, he was reckless, but he never faltered.

Munechika couldn’t help being attracted to him.

To end up cooperating with the police was humiliating, but there was no other way for him to obtain that man. He would have to carefully choose the information to relay. It was an enormous risk, but it would pay off.

If I want you, I’ll have you.

On Munechika’s face, a small smile slowly formed.

Afterword

Thank you for picking up my latest work. This is my second book with Shy Novels.

My supervisor asked me how I would feel about writing a book about a detective and the Yakuza. I love Yakuza stories so I replied straight away that I would love to, without thinking twice. I've written this book with continued enthusiasm.

When I was considering my writing strengths, I thought that writing a detective who was working on a special mission as the main character would be foolish, but I really enjoyed writing this. But I regret making Shiiba the virginal one and Munechika the confident one... (laughs)

It's just a little anecdote but, when I made the basic plot, I didn't include the character Shinozuka. My supervisor thought that it would be a good idea to add a superior or something like that for Shiiba. So I wondered about a husband who was in the higher divisions of the police. That was how the brother-in-law was created.

Shinozuka is the contrast to Munechika, but I think it really works in this story. I want to thank my supervisor for his excellent advice.

I also need to express my gratitude to Chiharu Nara who did the illustrations for the book. I had wanted to work with Chiharu before this, so to be working together was a real pleasure. The illustrations are so amazing. They took my breath away when I saw them.

Finally to all my readers. This book has quite a different feel from my last one, but I hope you still enjoy it.

Munechika, Shiiba and Shinozuka will be back for more, so I hope you look out for it.

Well, I look forward to seeing you all in the next volume!

January 2005 Saki Ada

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As the man passed by, Shiiba caught a whiff of a sweet fragrance. The man turned back to Shiiba meaningfully. Once again, their eyes met. With their eyes still locked, Shiiba pressed the close button. The doors slowly closed, finally breaking their gaze.

Welcome to Shinjuku district's Kabukicho, Japan's red light district. Here, the streets are dotted with bars, pachinko parlors and "love hotels," which cater to all sexes and sexual orientations. These are the streets which Detective Masaki Shiiba must patrol.

A recent rise in gun crimes forces Shiiba to go undercover and work with an "S" or spy, a member of a crime organization tasked to hand over information in exchange for special favors. Shiiba's S is a man from the influential Matsukura Group, and someone who seems to have developed a fondness for Shiiba.

But when the detective gets a mysterious call warning him about his S, seeds of doubt are planted. If he can't trust his S, who can he trust?



